Pathways and Potentialities: the role of social connections in the integration of reunited refugee families

This report summarises the findings of a 20-month research project led by Queen Margaret University, working in partnership with British Red Cross and Barnardo's. The research cohort were beneficiaries of the Family Reunion Integration Service, funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

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PATHWAYS AND POTENTIALITIES: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CONNECTIONS IN THE INTEGRATION OF REUNITED REFUGEE FAMILIES

1. Executive Summary

This report presents process and outcome learning from the research component of the Family Reunion Integration Service (hereafter FRIS). FRIS is a partnership project between British Red Cross, Queen Margaret University (QMU) and Barnardo's, funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). The service is offered to people granted refugee status through the UK asylum process, and who subsequently apply under family reunion rules[1] for their spouse and dependent children to join them in the UK; and to those arriving family members[2].

From January 2019 to September 2020, the QMU research team worked with project partners to design research according to the following objectives:
- To understand refugee reunited families' social connections and how these impact on their wider integration; and
- To develop a practical tool to measure these connections.

The research design is summarised in the diagram below.
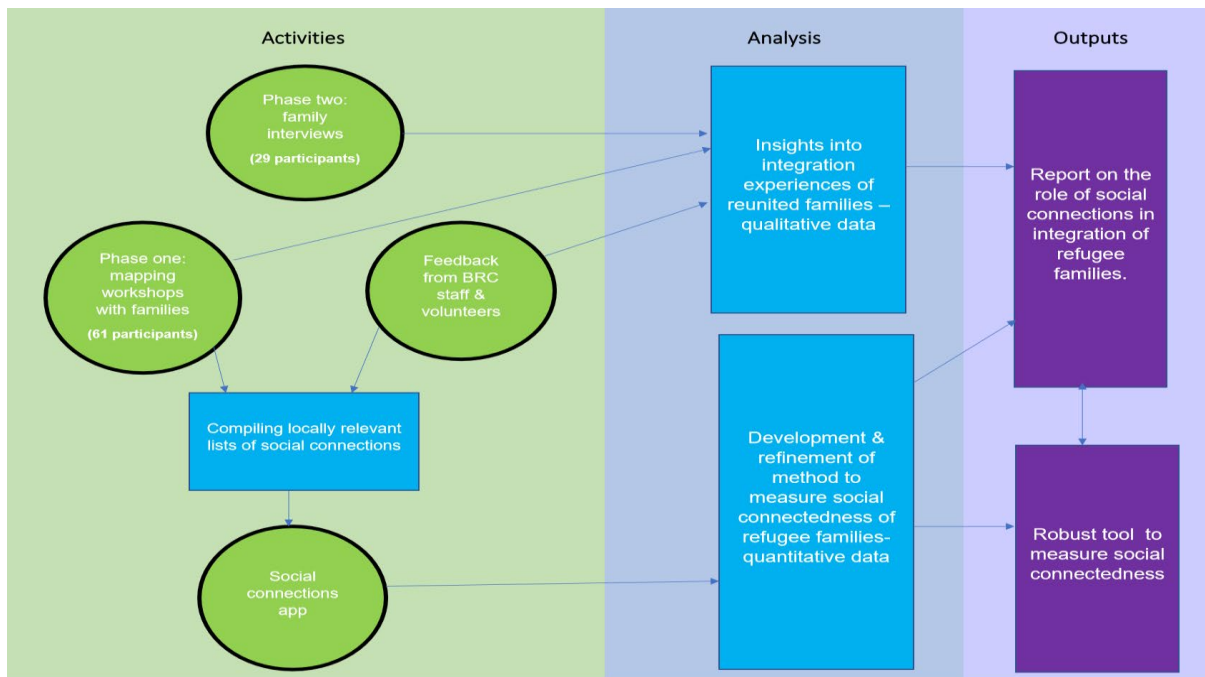
Figure 1: Research design

In this report, outcome learning refers to the emerging story from data collected through: eight social connections mapping workshops comprising 61 participants; 52 completed surveys gathered through the social connections app; and interviews with 29 family members during our phase two qualitative research. All research

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/settlement-refugee-or-humanitarian-protection/family-reunion
[2] For clarity, we use the terminology 'sponsor' to describe the person granted refugee status in the UK; and 'spouse' to describe adults who arrived as dependants of that person.

participants were beneficiaries of the FRIS. Further details of these methods are provided in chapter four whilst our qualitative findings are presented in chapter six.

Process learning refers to the team's reflections on piloting QMU's online social connections app. This includes reflections on the logistical and technical challenges of embedding the app in the partnership's wider programme of work. This learning is presented in chapter five of the report.

1.1 Process Learning

Using the QMU digital social connections app to support research, whilst seeking to embed its use within a casework setting generated useful operational and practical insights that will inform progress going forward in the extension period of QMU's work on the FRIS project (October 2020 - September 2021).

Primary learning from this phase of using the social connections app is that the app needs to be directly integrated into casework interventions and used as a tool for practice wherever possible. In the short term it is anticipated that this will offer more meaningful and consistent engagement with the social connections app and, in the longer term, will realise the ambitions of the app as a valuable tool for practice.

The extension phase of QMU's work will focus on working closely with selected FRIS projects to build on and share our collective learning on *how* best to embed use of the QMU Social Connections SCMT as a practical service delivery tool, within the existing project delivery model. This phase of work will therefore test the effectiveness of using the SCMT as a practical tool to help measure, assess and review refugee families' existing social connections.

1.2 Outcome Learning: Five Stages of Social Connections

Chapter six of the report focuses on findings from the qualitative data gathered through mapping workshops and 13 family interviews. From this data, five key stages emerged in the process of developing connections and, through these, progressing along a personal integration pathway. These are represented in figure 2 below and discussed in chapter seven. The five key stages are essentially building blocks from which individuals and families could do the everyday work of integration. While connectedness, and so integration, generally increases over time, this process is not necessarily linear. Instead, it can be disrupted, halted or accelerated by the presence or absence of trusting relationships and life events. The five stages which emerged were:

1. **Consolidating trusting relationships and re-establishing a sense of safety and security in the home.** This is mediated primarily through longer established connections with friends and family, and through relationships with service providers who could facilitate access to basic needs.

2. **Fostering new connections.** For the families in this study, all of whom had school-age children, these were primarily formed with other children

and parents by settling the children in suitable schools, ideally within walking distance. This offered the opportunity for both children and their parents to make formal and informal connections.

3. **Embedding into the local area** by establishing a connection with people in the immediate neighbourhood. This is mediated through the presence or absence of a feeling of safety and inclusion / welcome in the area and the opportunities to meet others in public spaces such as local shops and parks and so make informal connections. Several families spoke warmly of building strong relationships with neighbours because their children played together.

4. **Participating in the wider community** through accessing formal community groups and clubs (for example, football groups, women's groups) that speak to people's skills, interests and aspirations to participate and give back. These are mediated by trusting relationships with people outside of our immediate circle.

5. **Contributing to wider UK society** by *'giving back'*, an aspiration which can be realised through a multiplexity of bonding, bridging and linking relationships, built up over time.
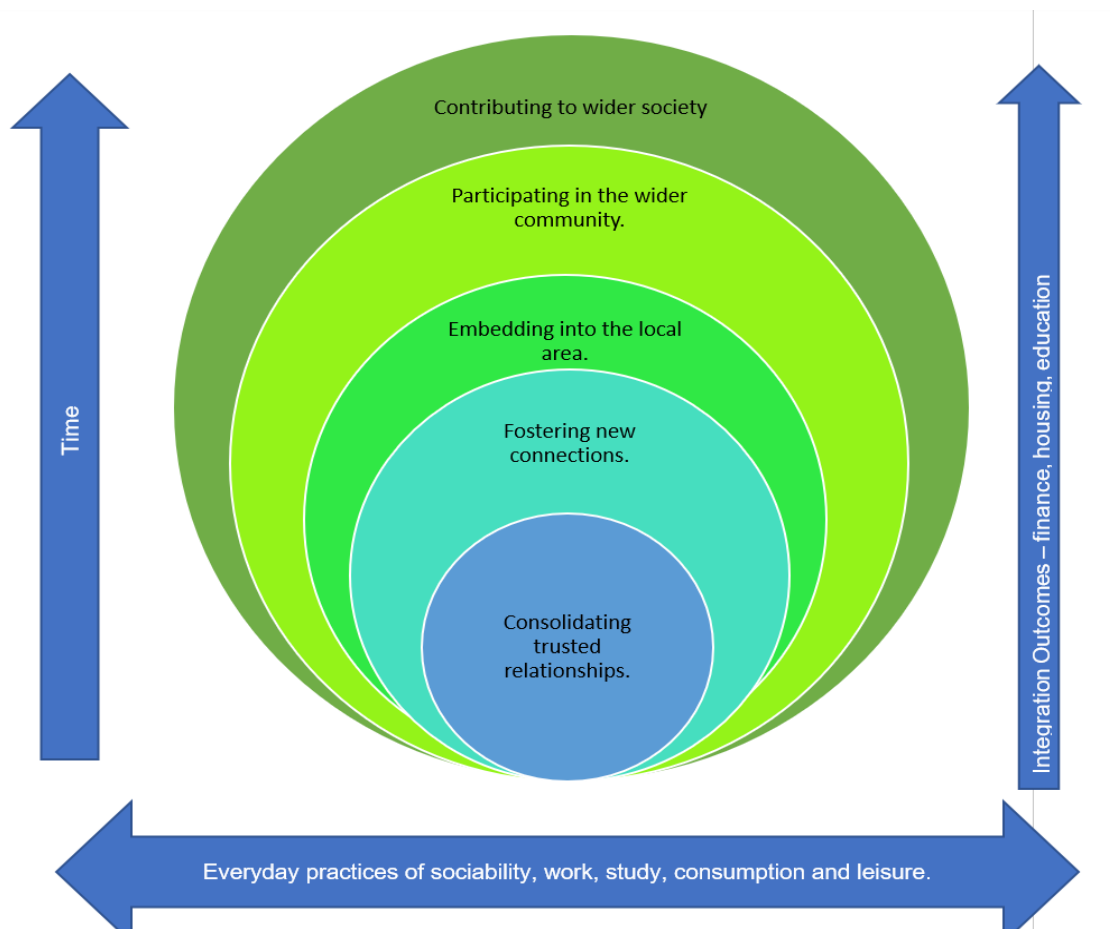
Figure 2: The Connections Continuum – the role of connections in integration

1.3 Brakes and Accelerators to Building Trusting Relationships

As the Connections Continuum (figure 2) suggests, the refugee families who participated in the research were at varying stages of the integration process depending on their circumstances and priorities. The brakes and accelerators in building trusting relationships and moving through each of the five stages of social connectedness to integrate are also outlined in chapter six.

1.4 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings suggest that reunited refugee families are at varying stages of the integration process depending on their circumstances and priorities. Their ability to progress along their chosen integration pathway is partly mediated by the absence or presence of trusting relationships, in addition to structural and systemic factors. Chapter eight outlines a series of implications and suggestions for policy and practice in supporting refugee families to exercise agency in building their own social networks and facilitating their progress along their personal integration pathways.

2. Project Background

The Institute of Global Health and Development (IGHD) at Queen Margaret University (QMU) has a longstanding and ongoing commitment to ensuring that high quality academic input positively informs the development of effective practice interventions in the field of refugee integration. As such, this research project was designed from the outset to support and draw inspiration from the direct service provision offered by the Family Reunion Integration Service.

This service, delivered by British Red Cross in partnership with Barnardo's, was itself explicitly designed to put into practice elements of the Indicators of Integration Framework (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019; Ager and Strang 2008). In many ways then, academic insights are woven into the fabric of the service itself, and the current project has offered various opportunities to refine and expand this synergy between research and service provision.

We provide here a brief overview of the operational elements of the Family Reunion Integration Service, and then describe the ways in which our research was designed to complement and inform its ongoing development.

2.1 The Family Reunion Integration Service

The Family Reunion Integration Service (hereafter FRIS) is a partnership project, originally funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) to run from January 2019 to September 2020. The service has been offered to people granted refugee status through the UK asylum process, and who subsequently applied under family reunion rules[3] for their spouse and dependent children to join them in the UK; and to those arriving family members. For clarity, in this report, we use the terminology 'sponsor' to describe the person granted refugee status in the UK; and 'spouse' to describe adults who arrived as dependants of that person.

Figure one: from asylum claimant to family sponsor

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[3] https://www.gov.uk/settlement-refugee-or-humanitarian-protection/family-reunion
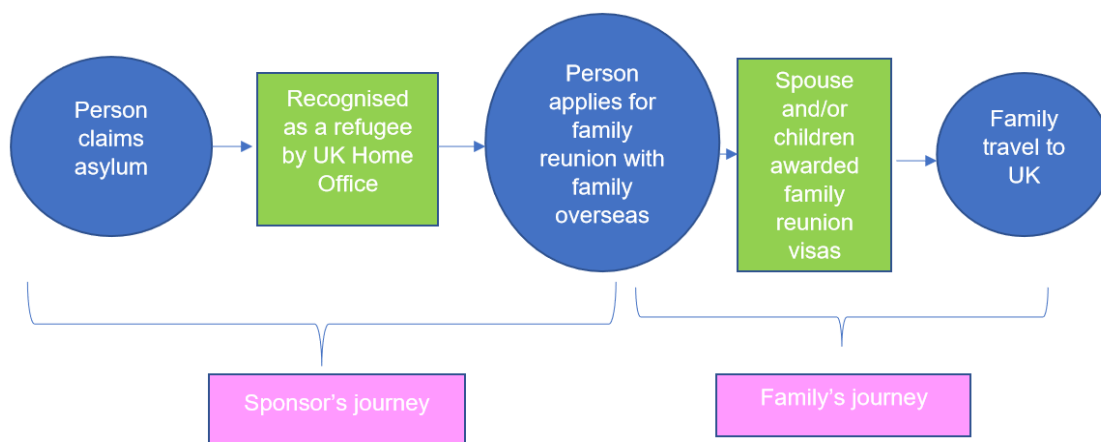
In developing the project, British Red Cross and their partners built on experience gained through their delivery of and their participation in previous services across the UK, most notably Scotland's Third Country Nationals Project (Marsden and Harris 2015) and Holistic Integration Service (Strang et al. 2016)[4]. The service was designed with a twofold purpose. Firstly, to ensure, through provision of casework services, that reunited families are able to access their rights to housing, education, health services and financial support, elements that map broadly onto the Means and Markers layer of the Indicators of Integration Framework (Ndofor-Tah 2019). Secondly, through family-focused activities and interventions, the FRIS has sought to support families to build social connections, recognised as equally vital to progress along the multi-dimensional and dynamic pathways of integration.

This emphasis on social connections is drawn directly from academic and practice literature. Ager and Strang's (2008) framework for understanding integration, and its most recent iteration (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019) identify three types of social relationships – bonds, bridges and links - as constituting the relationships through which integration happens. A multitude of further studies have emphasised the importance of relational accounts of integration (Strang and Ager 2010; Phillimore 2012; Cheung and Phillimore 2014; Ryan 2011; Lancee 2012). Therefore, to complement the core casework service, additional activities were offered to participants, with sites variously focussing on different categories of connection. In Birmingham and Glasgow, these activities were delivered in partnership with Barnardo's.

Figure two: FRIS Operations[5]

FRIS Operational Work			
Core Casework (all areas)	**Family bonds lens** (Birmingham & Glasgow)	**Community bonds** (Leeds, Sheffield & Cardiff)	**Bridges with Host Community** (Plymouth, Leicester & Belfast)
	Peer Support Hub	Peer Buddies	Host Buddies
	Psychosocial sessions	Peer Education	Language Holidays
	Family Groupwork		Funding Community Activities
	Barnardo's child-focussed casework		

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[4] Full list of partners: Scottish Refugee Council (lead partner), British Red Cross, Glasgow Clyde College, Workers' Educational Association, Bridges Programmes.
[5] Reproduced from British Red Cross documents provided at Project Inception Workshops.

2.2 Research Component

Throughout the FRIS, the research team have worked in partnership with British Red Cross and Barnardo's to design research tools that support practice whilst at the same time gathering rich understandings of how refugee family members have been able to develop their social connections and how this has impacted on their wellbeing. All research tools and activities were reviewed and approved by the QMU Ethics Committee, including the major revisions made to our plans due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our research objectives have been:
- to understand refugee reunited families' social connections and how these impact on their wider integration;
- to develop a practical tool to measure these connections, in line with the Indicators of Integration Framework.

In this report, the research team presents the process and outcome learning from the past twenty months of working towards these objectives. By outcome learning, we refer to the emerging story from data collected through: eight social connections mapping workshops comprising 61 participants; 52 completed surveys gathered through the social connections app; and interviews with 29 family members during our phase two qualitative research. All research participants were beneficiaries of the FRIS. Further details of these methods are provided in chapter four whilst our qualitative findings are presented in chapter six.

Process learning refers to the team's reflections on piloting QMU's online social connections app. This includes reflections on the logistical and technical challenges of embedding the app in the partnership's wider programme of work. This learning is presented in chapter five.

Figure three: research design summary
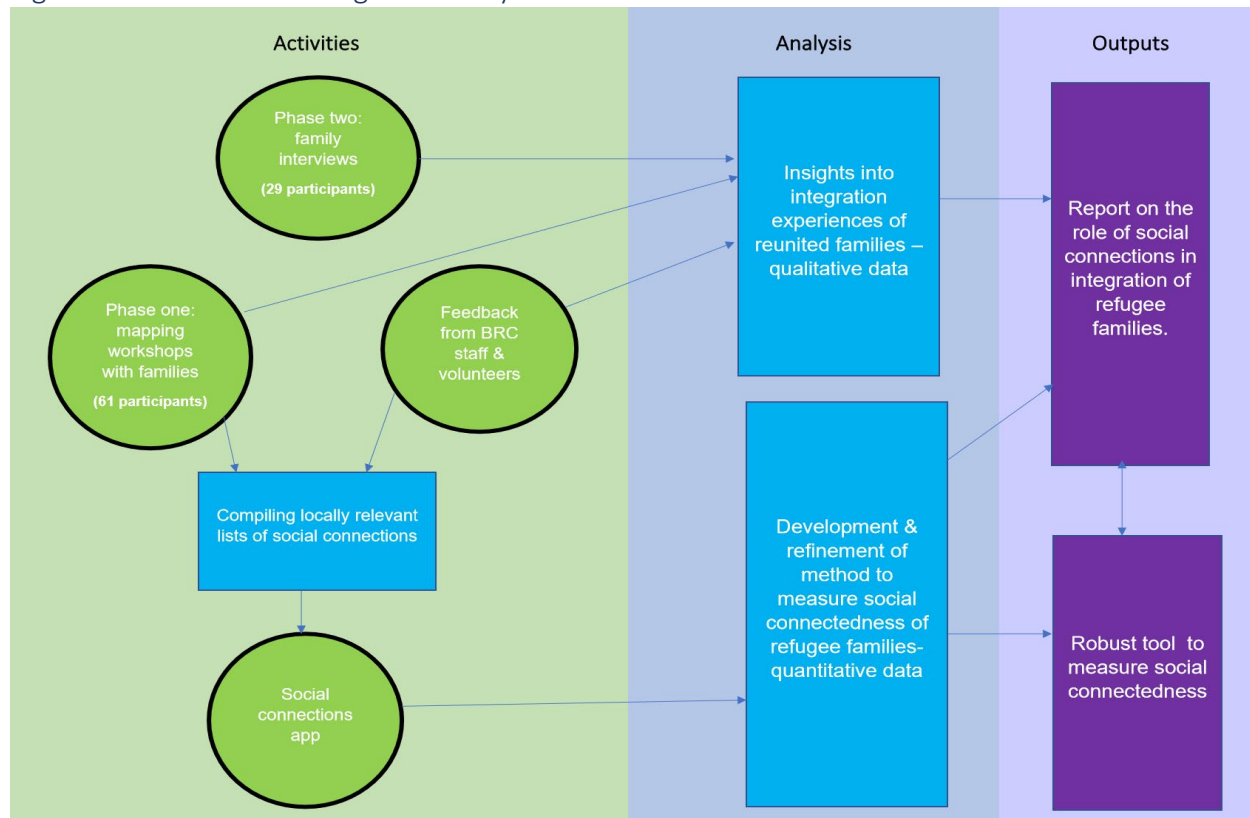
2.3 Impact of COVID-19 Restrictions

Prior to the pandemic, we had liaised with the British Red Cross in Cardiff to develop a series of site-specific workshops. These were scheduled for March – April 2020 but could not be carried out. Therefore, after discussion with all partners from March 2020 onwards, we worked closely with Barnardo's in Glasgow and Birmingham to develop a schedule of remote family interviews with families who were benefiting from their specialist services under the 'Family Lens' work (see figure one above). This enabled us to use our interviews productively to explore not only families' connectedness prior to lockdown measures being introduced, but to contribute to understanding the impact of the COVID-19 restrictions on recently reunited refugee families.

Similarly, our social connections app, the second strand of the Mapping Tool, was originally designed to be completed in person with families whilst they were attending casework activities at their local British Red Cross office. Once again, significant development time was invested in ensuring that it could instead be distributed and completed remotely. We reflect upon the challenges and opportunities of this in chapter five below. Before moving on to describe in more detail these research activities, we present in chapter three the theoretical frameworks that have informed our approach to this project.

3. Theoretical Frameworks

Our research cuts across two areas of theory: migrant integration and social networks. We summarise here key points from each area of study that have guided us in our research, introducing initial observations as to where our findings contribute to understandings of these complex and sometimes contested conceptual frameworks.

3.1 Integration

Ager and Strang's (2008) framework for understanding integration identifies ten core domains through which to analyse integration, drawing upon Berry's (1997) elaboration of intercultural group relations and Hobfoll's (1998) resource acquisition theory and Social Capital Theory (Putnam 2001; Coleman 1988; Granovetter 1973,1983; Szreter and Woolcock 2004). The Indicators of Integration Framework (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019), reproduced at figure three expands this to fourteen domains. Whilst this is far from the only lens through which to understand integration, and whilst recognising that the term integration itself remains contested, this framework has structured our research activities.

Figure four: Indicators of Integration Framework (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019)
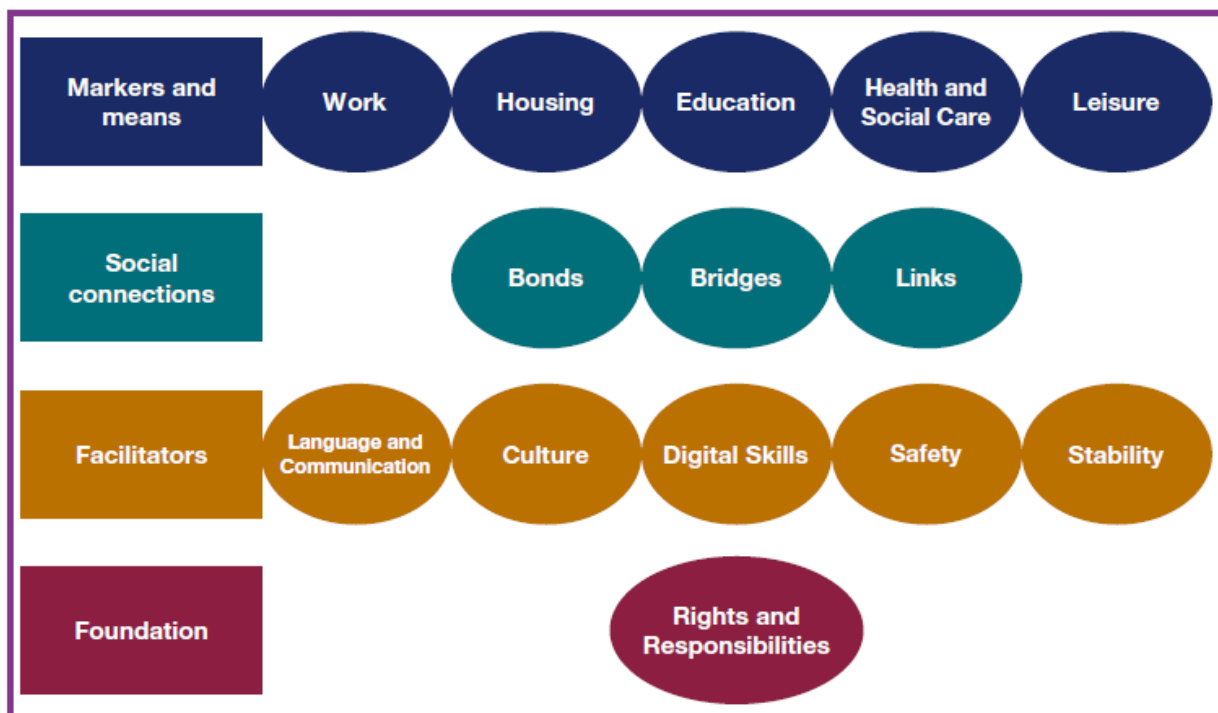
We note here the importance of reading this framework not solely as a set of desirable integration outcomes, but as a 'mid-level theory' that attempts to bridge the gap between research, policy and practice (Ager and Strang 2008: 590). Crucial to this are four principles that form the bedrock for the framework's implementation. We explore each in brief below.

Multi-dimensional

As the graphic above demonstrates, integration is understood as comprising multiple dimensions. However, these should not be read as entirely discrete and separate. Instead, the framework insists upon the inter-connectedness of the domains. For example, employment is simultaneously a desired outcome of integration but also a precursor to several other dimensions, socially and economically (for an illustration, see Bloch 2008). Similarly, there is growing evidence from both academics and practitioners pointing to the symbiotic relationship between language skills and building relationships with local people, getting into employment and progressing in education (for example, Morrice et al. 2019; Tip et al. 2019; Platts-Fowler and Robinson 2011).

Multi-directional

Integration involves adaptation, not just by newcomers but from within and across settled communities. Debates remain however about the extent to which multi-directionality is enacted in policy and practice. Kirkwood and colleagues, working in Scotland (Kirkwood et al. 2015a: 1), unearth the ways in which "accounts of integration 'failure' may support 'two-way' conceptions of integration whilst still blaming asylum seekers for any lack of integration." Daley (2009) similarly cites a perceived competition for resources between newly arriving and host communities, especially in areas of marginalisation and exclusion. Difficulties in integration might then not result from inherent racism, or a necessary unwillingness on the part of dominant cultural groups to accommodate newcomers, rather the "shortage of and inequality in distribution of and access to resources and services" (Daley 2009:164).

Responsibility

The Indicators of Integration Toolkit (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019) identifies three sets of actors who share this responsibility: newly arrived residents, receiving communities and government at all levels. Despite this, there remains a tendency to position migrants as vulnerable and passive actors within integration and immigration policy. This is increasingly contested, with recent literature suggesting that it is important to re-position migrants and refugees as agentive actors within integration. Such work highlights migrants' resilience against the inadequacy and the risks of blanket assumptions of vulnerability (e.g. Castles 2003; Pupavac 2008; Rainbird 2002).

As regards receiving communities, these must be understood as neither static nor homogenous. The fluidity and heterogeneity of communities are wonderfully captured by a report by the Inclusive Neighbourhood Project in Belfast (Greer 2011), where it is not only newcomers who are involved in processes of integration but so too locals. Other insights on involving receiving communities in integration include the importance of mobilising existing community assets that can support integration and ensuring that refugee settlement be delivered *with* and not done *to* receiving communities (Scottish Community Development Council 2018).

Government has a responsibility at a multitude of levels in creating integration policy. Yet, as Mulvey (2015) argues, government discourse and policy across a range of other social domains, immigration control being prime amongst them, have a role in shaping the structural opportunities afforded to migrants and refugees. Political and media discourse that conflate immigration with national security, crime and (failures

in) border control can fuel and reinforce negative public attitudes towards immigrants. In turn, these coalesce to undermine individuals' moves towards integration (Mulvey 2015).

The Indicators of Integration Framework identifies three core factors (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019: 7) as shaping integration: "time, place and person." Indeed, there is increasing agreement that integration takes place locally, and that measures designed to promote integration must take account of local realities (see, for instance, Mulvey 2015; Kearns and Whitley 2015; Thomas 2019). Levels of economic deprivation, competition for local resources, the availability of housing and jobs, and diversity and history of settlement may all have a major bearing on the conditions for local integration (Atfield et al. 2007). As regards sociodemographic factors, or individual/family human capital, whilst some of these – the category of entry, duration of stay and region of origin – are specific to migrant populations, others – such as age, gender, family structure, living conditions and geographical concentration – are common to both newcomers and local populations (OECD/EU 2018).

Literature from across the sources consulted in this review confirms that integration, across every level and domain, requires time to develop. This is true over relatively short time periods (see Cebulla et al. 2010; Kearns and Whitley 2015), and even more consistently across generations (Demireva, 2017; Spicer 2008). In the case of reunited refugee families, the experiences of arriving parents may be very different from their children, who may be born either in the parents' country of origin or may be second generation immigrants, born in the country of asylum. This said, accepting that time is a factor influencing integration should not render integration as linear. Instead, it temporality nestles amongst other factors to confirm a view of integration as "an active, on-going dynamic process which can take years or may never be achieved" (Cheung and Phillimore 2013: 7).

3.2 Understanding and Measuring Social Connections

Whilst we may dissect integration and discuss its social, economic or even spatial facets (Bloch 2008; Kearns and Whitely 2015; Spicer 2008), integration remains a relational process whereby individuals with their own social identities and histories mix with other individuals with their own social identities and histories. Whilst connections may yield access to material or informational resources, they are also an important precursor to wellbeing, not exclusively but perhaps most significantly for people whose social networks have been disrupted due to (forced) migration (Strang and Quinn 2019). Indeed, a lack of connectedness, or, in other words, isolation from others has been linked for all sections of the community to deteriorating physical and mental health outcomes (see for example, Silove 2013; Hobfoll et al. 2007).

Connectedness is also central to frameworks that measure individual and community resilience, defined in socio-ecological perspective not as an innate character trait but as a relational process (Lenette et al. 2012: 248). Resilience, as we note above, has increasingly become the counterpoint to tropes of refugees as eternal victims (see Marlowe 2010). Connection to others, whilst not always an unmitigated good due to the potential for some to be excluded from networks of social relationships (for

example, Um et al. 2020), is nonetheless a crucial component of enabling people to grow in confidence and to exercise their own agency in navigating and influencing the systems around them.

If social connections are central to our understanding of integration, and to refugee wellbeing, how then can we measure them? Social relationships have typically been analysed according to their function as either bridges, bonds or links. This is the distinction applied in the both the original (Ager and Strang 2008) and most recent Indicators of Integration Frameworks (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019). Below, we explore these categories in more detail.

Bridging Connections

First coined by Granovetter in 1973, and then revised in 1983, 'bridging' ties – upon which the notion of bridging social capital is founded – emphasises the importance of information diffusion through "weak ties." These are relationships with actors outside of our own social circles or, in other words, with people 'different' than us. By 'bridging' between two distinct social worlds, weak ties facilitate the flow of informational and other resources through diverse social groups, leading for example to greater job opportunities for each of the groups. Notable examples of research on 'bridging' connections include Kirkwood et al.'s (2015a) discursive analysis of locals' narrations of their relationships with refugees in Scotland, McPherson's (2010) and Strang et al.'s (2017) engagement with refugee's accounts of integration in Australia and the UK respectively, and Spicer's (2008) analysis of how the quality of bridging connections shapes refugees' integration and settlement in specific neighbourhoods. Kearns and Whitley (2015) for their part, have found that time spent in local areas was a stronger indicator of peoples' integration than overall time spent in the UK. We take from these the simple yet powerful understanding that relationships with 'others' or 'different' actors play a key role in fostering a sense of belonging, settlement and integration. They hinder when they bear negative and exclusionary characteristics and enhance when they facilitate the flow of information and opportunities among different social groups.

Bonding Connections

Coleman's (1988) and Putnam's (1966; 2000, see also Putnam et al. 2009) work defines 'bonds' as a form of social capital derived from relationships with those in whom we trust, often because they are similar to us and inhabit our social worlds. These 'strong ties,' or tight-knit relationships with high levels of trust, are sources of bonding social capital: a social, emotional and indeed material 'safety net' for the members of its social networks. Refugees' prioritisation of reunification with their families (Connell et al. 2010; Strang et al. 2016; Scottish Refugee Council / Refugee Council / UNHCR 2018), for instance, and consequent discussions around their social isolation (cf Beswick 2015), speak to the difficulties that present themselves when forging new (bridging) relationships in the absence of existing trusting (bonding) relationships.

Linking Connections

People do not only forge relationships with those similar and different to themselves, but also with new forms of governance, health systems and public bodies, indeed new forms of being citizens. First coined by Szreter and Woolcock (2004), the notion

of 'linking' ties emphasises relationships with state and public bodies and the individuals that represent them. These relationships are based on mutual expectations: that citizens fulfill their responsibilities of citizenship in return for public goods and services. The authors argue that, especially in "poor communities" (with whom many recently arrived refugees share structural similarities), "the extent (or lack thereof) of respectful and trusting ties to representatives of formal institutions… has a major bearing on their welfare" (Szreter and Woolcock 2004: 655). In the context of work with refugees living in high income contexts, academics and practitioners have consistently argued that systems barriers impede the formation of such linking ties, limiting people's access to rights (see for example, Strang et al. 2017).

In summary, 'linking' ties enable newcomers to integrate into welfare and state systems and mediate their relationships with the state; 'bonding' connections provide social, emotional and material support in this multi-directional process of acculturation and identity transformation; whilst 'bridging' ties facilitate the flow of information, opportunities and a sense of belonging and being part of a community among people who have just met. We move below to explore how the concepts of integration and connectedness, as influenced by personal circumstances and time, intersect for reunited refugee families.

3.3 Integration and Connection Over Time: Reunited Families

Whilst acknowledging that the integration process is not always linear, we outline here three temporal stages that are likely to shape the integration journeys of reunited refugee families. Within this analysis, we avoid as much as possible relying on the assumption that 'family' is defined as a heterosexual couple with children. Many families using the FRIS do not conform to this structure, being instead comprised of couples without children or of single parents. There is little literature, however, that provides an in-depth view of the ways in which family structures might shape integration.

The sponsor's journey

In the UK, refugees are only eligible to apply for family reunion once they have been granted either Refugee Status or Humanitarian Protection. Thus, excepting resettled refugees, the sponsor can only begin the process of bringing family members to join them once they have successfully navigated the asylum system. Critics have argued that seeking asylum can in itself be an anti-integrative process (see for example Bakker et al. 2016; Mulvey 2010, 2015; Zetter et al. 2003; Robinson 2003), with government policies that restrict access to the labour market seen as particularly damaging to the possibilities of integration (Mayblin 2016; Mulvey 2015; Bloch 2008). As regards social connections, the literature draws attention to the compounding effects of insecurity on social isolation and poor mental health for some refugees (Strang and Quinn 2019), particularly for those who spend long periods in the asylum process. Indeed, Kearns and Whitley (2015: 2120) find that "each additional year spent waiting for a decision reduced the likelihood that a migrant would have available social support by 12-14%."

Even once the sponsor has been granted leave to remain, the transition from asylum support systems into mainstream financial support, housing and potentially work is

often riddled with complexity (Strang et al. 2015, 2016; Refugee Council 2017). Most newly granted refugees will at some stage have to present as homeless and avail themselves of local temporary homelessness provision (see, for instance, Smith 2018). Not only might a move to this type of housing disrupt existing neighbourhood-based social ties, but temporary accommodation can be a site where people experience elevated levels of racist abuse or other anti-social behaviour (Strang et al. 2016).

Being Reunited

Refugees who make the initial journey to seek asylum without their family members may well experience increased access to rights after being granted leave to remain, but their ongoing separation from family members can leave them nonetheless 'paralysed' in their everyday lives (Scottish Refugee Council / Refugee Council / UNHCR 2018: 26; Connell et al. 2010; Refugee Council/Oxfam 2018). Bringing family members over and re-establishing family bonds is therefore a critical concern and is a precursor for the sponsor's continuing integration across other domains (ibid). However, unless in exceptional and compelling humanitarian circumstances, older siblings, grandparents, cousins, nieces and nephews are not eligible to join their family members in the UK, reflecting a limited and culturally contingent understanding of family. Grillo (2008: 16) is critical of the imposition of the nuclear family model in processes of family reunion and integration:

> "Migrants arriving from different cultural backgrounds, often with very different pre-migration cultural frameworks confront policymakers who may persist in employing an ideal (European) model of the nuclear family to judge qualification for entry."

Little is known of the situation for spouses and children who await, in third countries, the result of family reunion applications. Some may already have moved from "home" to third countries where they live in situations of economic and physical precarity (Beswick 2015; Connell et al. 2010). Yet Spencer and Charsley (2016) remind us that for spouses and children who know they are soon to travel to join the sponsor, integration begins well before they cross any border at all, through the maintenance across transnational space of their family bonds with the sponsor and their own preparations to begin life in a new country context.

Navigating reunion

If the available evidence from refugee families confirms that family reunification is a core contributor to refugee well-being and so to people's ability to integrate, it is equally clear that the moment of family reunion is not always a straightforward one, both on practical and emotional levels (Beswick 2015; Marsden and Harris 2015; Connell et al. 2010). When family members arrive, a refugee sponsor's circumstances change from a single person to one with dependents. This has implications for welfare benefits, and the administrative challenges in applying for changes can result in the sponsor experiencing destitution just as families arrive (Marsden and Harris 2015). Simultaneously, the arrival of dependents usually prompts a need to find a home with sufficient space for the new arrivals. Families can initially find themselves in overcrowded temporary homeless accommodation as they wait for a considerable time before alternative, suitable accommodation

becomes available. As during the transition from asylum support, these further house moves can again disrupt emerging social networks, and place considerable strain on recently reunited family units (Beswick 2015). For children of school age, house moves can disrupt or prevent them from beginning their schooling (Bourgonje 2010: 39).

The families in our cohort then are broadly speaking navigating this final stage of a journey. In chapter six, we seek to extend and deepen our understandings of these pathways, moving beyond the initial stages of reunion and into a longer term view of the place of family reunion in integration, and more broadly of the role of the contextual factors of time, place and family in the dynamic process of settling in the UK.

4. Methods

In this chapter, we describe the quantitative and qualitative methods used in our study which together offer us a rich source of data to understand refugee reunited families' social connections and how these impact on their wider integration.

4.1 Overview

Upon successful mobilisation in quarter one of the FRIS project, the first element of the QMU research team's work was to conduct a thorough review of the latest research and practice literature on refugee integration was to gain a closer understanding of comparable integration policies including in the European Union (most notably the Netherlands), the Commonwealth (most notably Australia and Canada) and the United States. Taking stock of the literature review and subsequent consultations with the lead partner, we then produced a research protocol (Annex RP1) to be deployed over the duration of the Family Reunion and Integration Service.

As outlined in the Protocol, our research aims to better understand the role of social networks in integration. Specifically, we ask: how do one's relationships with the social environment influence one's integration? From this we drew our research objectives:

- To gain an understanding of participants' awareness of the availability of social resources that facilitate integrations by:
    - Mapping the development of participants' social connections over time (specifically bonds, bridges and links);
    - Mapping participants'' trust in these social connections over time;
    - Mapping the extent to which relationships between participants and identified social connections are reciprocal.
- To compare patterns of participants' social relationships that influence integration at the level of the individual (i.e. women, men, adolescents / sponsors, spouses, dependants) and the household (i.e. the family unit) and identify salient explanatory attributes (e.g. country of origin; place of settlement).

To this end, we adopted a mixed-methods research design. Firstly, we implemented the two elements of the Social Connections Mapping Tool, namely participatory workshops with FRIS beneficiaries and quantitative data collection through the social connections app. Complementing this strand of the work, we then conducted qualitative interviews, using creative participatory methods with a sample of FRIS beneficiaries in Birmingham and Glasgow. Our research was reviewed by a specialist Research Advisory Group (see Annex RAG) convened in September 2019.

The Social Connections Mapping Tool, which formed the backbone of our quantitative research design, combines local community workshops with an online survey. It has been designed and developed by the IGHD at QMU and is built upon a social connections measurement method that has already been used in a variety of national and international contexts, including with asylum seekers in Glasgow and displaced Yezidi people in Kurdistan (see Strang and Quinn 2019; Strang et al.

2020). The original method consists of face-to-face participatory workshops and card sorting techniques. In our study, we piloted the development and use of an app which digitises the individual interview and card-sorting aspects of the Social Connections Tool, enabling the research team to gather data from a potentially far larger and more geographically dispersed cohort of people. However, its aims and design remain closely rooted in past research experience. Our research activities are summarised in table one, and we provide further details of each element from the Social Connections App section: 4.2 to the Remote Interviews section: 4.4.

Table one: project timeline

Timescale	Research Activities
Quarter 2 (Jan – Mar 19)	Literature Review
Quarter 3 (Apr – Jun 19)	Research Design and Ethics Approval
Quarter 4 (Jul – Sept 19)	Research Phase One • Workshops with FRIS beneficiaries; consultations with local staff. • Populating the online survey (the 'app').
Quarter 5 (Oct – Dec 19)	Capacity Building • Workshops with staff to support social connections app data collection • Ongoing liaison with service teams. • Development and review of operational guidance for data collection. Roll out of social connections app data collection Research Advisory Group meeting
Quarter 6 (Jan – Mar 20)	Engaging with Staff: Learnings and Research Design Phase 2 • Cross-site Data Meet on app data collection o Reflect on feedback and develop solutions • Monitoring of App Data Collection
Quarter 7 (Apr – Jun 20)	Revise Research Design due to COVID-19 • Amended Ethics Approval • Liaison with Barnardo's re participant recruitment. Develop remote app capabilities • Implement feedback from frontline teams.
Quarter 8 (Jul – Sept 20)	Research Phase Two • Remote family interviews App Remote Data Collection Phase One (ongoing)

4.2 The Social Connections App

The app is designed to deliver an online survey that digitises what was previously a manual card-sorting exercise undertaken face-to-face with small numbers of research participants. At the outset of the project, our ambition was that the app would be administered by British Red Cross staff with support from the QMU team.

British Red Cross staff's role would be to introduce the app to their adult service beneficiaries, set up a new survey for each person to complete, and then provide them with a tablet or laptop from which to complete the survey, on their own, and save the results. The survey itself is structured as follows.

Respondents complete a series of demographic questions. The final list of 17 questions (Annex AQ) was arrived at through a consideration of the key attributes differentiating the various subgroups in the FRIS beneficiary population and ensuring a degree of harmonisation with standardised surveys (such as the UK Census). They are then asked, for each item of a list of locally-specific connections, generated through local mapping workshops (see Workshops section: 4.3), three questions, namely:

- Whether they have had contact with that person or organisation within the past six months;
- The extent to which they trust that person or organisation (not at all, a little, a lot); and
- Whether that person or organisation has asked them for help in the past six months.

These questions are designed to measure, respectively:

- the quantity of social connections of an individual, and thus to some extent the relative connectedness or otherwise of family members;
- the quality of those connections measured firstly by levels of trust and secondly, by the extent to which these connections offer opportunities for reciprocity.

The original plan agreed within the FRIS partnership was that operational staff would ensure that every adult family member completed the online questions twice – once at the beginning of their engagement with the casework element of the service and once when they exited casework, usually after three months. This would enable the QMU research team to analyse longitudinal data on changes in connectedness, both in terms of the quality and quantity of connections over time and the extent to which these connections influence integration.

While the amount of data gathered through the app in this phase of the project has been less than originally projected, our partnership working with FRIS has enabled significant technical development of the app itself. Moreover, our ongoing liaison with teams at each FRIS site has supported the research team to understand the challenges and opportunities of integrating the app into service provision. Our process learning from this is detailed in chapter five, where we provide further details of the app's functionality with a focus on the production of individual and group level social connections 'maps', for use not only by researchers but service providers. Learning from our partnership working with British Red Cross during this project has also informed our revised User Guide (see Annex AG2).

4.3 Workshops

In order to generate the locally-specific connections required to populate the social connections survey, the QMU team conducted eight participatory workshops in the locations across the UK where British Red Cross deliver FRIS: Birmingham, Glasgow, Belfast, Leeds, Sheffield, Cardiff, Plymouth and Leicester. Workshops took place between April and July 2019.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited directly by British Red Cross staff according to parameters set by the research team, from amongst people aged 18 or over who were currently accessing the FRIS. From the outset, the research team were mindful of the power dynamics inherent in any research situation (in the context of work with refugees, see Mackenzie et al. 2007). Thus, when seeking informed consent from participants at the outset of each workshop, we made every effort to stress to families that they were free to leave at any point without giving any reasons, and that their interactions with the research team would have no bearing on the services they receive from British Red Cross. An overview of workshop participants is provided in table two.

Table two: Demographic profile of workshop participants

Location	No. of families	No. of participants	Women	Men	Countries of origin
Birmingham	4	11	6	5	Eritrea Iran Sudan
Glasgow	2	4	2	2	Eritrea Sudan
Belfast	8	13	7	6	Eritrea Somalia Sudan Yemen
Leeds	5	8	5	3	India Iran Somalia Sudan
Sheffield	5	8	5	3	Afghanistan Iran Palestine Yemen
Cardiff	4	5	3	2	Iran Syria Sudan Uganda
Plymouth	4	7	4	3	Ethiopia Iran Sudan
Leicester	3	5	3	2	Iran Sudan Syria
Total	**35**	**61**	**35**	**26**	

Conducting the workshops

The team adapted methodology developed in previous research projects (e.g. Strang and Quinn 2019; Strang et al. 2020) to facilitate discussion around the people or organisations from whom family members would seek advice or assistance in three different hypothetical scenarios. These were designed to be both relevant to family's current circumstances and to elicit a range of connections. The scenarios were:

> Whom would you speak to or go to for help if:
> - The hot water in your home wasn't working?
> - Your child was unhappy at school?
> - You were looking for work?

As the discussions developed, the research team mapped connections visually onto flipcharts (see figure five). Having established whom participants would speak to in the first instance, researchers asked which people or organisations might help were the problem not to be resolved after this initial contact. This probing for second-level connections enabled us to map indirect access to support and service as well as to infer relationships participants might draw upon to hold structures accountable. Once families agreed that they had no further connections of relevance to add to the charts, researchers worked with participants to locate each of the connections discussed during the workshop on a 'geo-map' showing the proximity of each person or service to families' homes. This exercise was designed to gain a sense of the place-based (cf Spicer 2008) nature of their relationships at household, neighbourhood, city, national and international level.

Following the workshops with families, QMU researchers facilitated a discussion with British Red Cross operational staff and, where possible, with peer volunteers who had experience of the asylum and refugee family reunion processes. Staff and volunteers were shown the connections generated by discussions with the families. They were asked to reflect on any gaps in the services and organisations represented and to provide clarification where this was required regarding organisation's role and remit. This method of triangulation enabled the researchers to better understand the local context within which families live, including those occasioned by city-level specificities and devolved contexts. It also ensured that the ultimate list of connections for inclusion in later stages of the study was as relevant as possible to all refugees in that area. As in previous studies (Strang and Quinn 2014), staff knew of significantly more local connections than were referenced by families themselves.

Figure five: connections generated by discussions with families (Leicester)

Figure six: additional connections (in black) generated by staff (Leicester)

The number of connections generated through workshops with families and triangulation with staff and volunteers was significant and, in most sites, exceeded 50. It was therefore necessary to distil these down to a more manageable list in order that the survey generated through the app not be too onerous. The team used a four-step process to do so:

- Identification of similar or the same connections to be amalgamated – for example, grouping distinct services provided by Local Authorities under one generic heading of 'City Council;
- Prioritisation of connections identified by families - if families identified a specific third sector organisation, this was retained over third sector organisation's identified only by staff;
- Agreement around generic labels for personal connections e.g. 'a neighbour'; 'a friend or family member living outside the UK'; and
- Circulation of finalised lists to operational staff in each location to conduct final checks for spelling, phrasing and relevance.

In light of the often transient nature of integration services, this process of distillation and cross-checking with operational staff took up to five iterations.

4.4 Remote Interviews

The COVID-19 pandemic required us to re-design our phase two research plans. When it became apparent that face to face research activities would not be possible within the timescale of the project, we worked closely with partners to develop realistic, safe and appropriate remote interviewing techniques. These revisions were subject to review and granted approval by the QMU Ethics Committee.

Participant recruitment

The resulting phase two of our research comprised a series of remote interviews, conducted via Zoom or telephone according to family preference and digital capacity. Interviewees were all living in either Glasgow or Birmingham and were in receipt of support from Barnardo's over lockdown period. This was deemed crucial to ensure that we contacted only families who, if they had any immediate concerns or issues, could be referred back to a trusted partner for direct support. Identifying and contacting interview participants proceeded as follows:

- Criteria for inclusion were:
  - families who were not in crisis and for whom there were no known concerns around safeguarding or wellbeing;
  - adult family members and any children aged 12 or over.
- Where family members agree to be interviewed, Barnardo's staff, with their permission, shared basic information about the family, including their contact details, with QMU.
- A member of the research team then made further contact, providing verbal information, with the assistance of an interpreter if required, on the format and purpose of interviews, and confirming the time and date to carry out the interview.
- Following initial telephone contact, written, translated information sheets – including information specific to young people – was posted to families prior to the interview being conducted. This included blank copies of a visual 'Wheel of Life' diagram adapted from a life-coaching tool developed by Full Circle Global .

This approach resulted in participation from thirteen families, comprising 21 adults (10 men and 11 women), and eight young people (five boys, three girls) from five different countries of origin. A full demographic profile of participants is included in table three.

Table three: remote interview overview

| ID	Postcode	Country of origin	Language of interview	Family composition	Gender of sponsor	Interviewees	# children in education	# children not in education	Time in UK - sponsor	Time in UK - family	Housing situation	Happy in housing?
G2	G20	Eritrea	English	Single parent	Woman	Son (18)	Two	None	5 years	10 months	Temporary	No - overcrowding
G3	G32	Iran	Farsi	Two parent family	Man	Sponsor (m) Wife Son (18)	One	One (18 years old)	1.5 years	7 months	Temporary	No - overcrowding
B4	B36	Sudan	English	Two parent family	Man	Sponsor (m) Wife Son (13)	None	Four	14 months	5 months	Temporary	No - want ground floor/house
B5	B31	Sudan	Arabic	Two parent family	Man	Sponsor (m) Wife	None	Four	20 months	5 months	Temporary	No – neighbours' complaints
B6	B66	Iran (Kurdish)	Kurdish	Two parent family	Man	Sponsor (m) Wife	None	Two	2 years	6 months	Temporary	Yes
G7	G22	Iran	Farsi	Two parent family	Man	Sponsor (m) Wife Son (14)	One	None	3.5 years	9 months	Permanent	Yes
G8	G40	Sudan	Arabic	Two parent family	Man	Sponsor (m) Son (12)	Six	One (pre-school)	3 years	9 months	Temporary	No-overcrowding
G9	G15	Palestine	English	Two parent family	Man	Sponsor (m) Wife	Two	None	2.5 years	11 months	Temporary	Yes
G10	G45	Nigerian	English	Single parent	Woman	Sponsor (f) Daughter (13)	Two	One (eldest)	9.5 years	5 months	Temporary	No – too small, bad area
B12	B20	Iran	Farsi	Two parent family	Man	Wife Daughter (16)	None	Two	1.5 years	8 months	Temporary	No – poor condition/dirty
G13	G40	Sudan	Arabic	Two parent family	Man	Sponsor (m) Wife	Two	None	3 years	One year	Permanent	No – wife housebound
B14	B31	Eritrea	Tigrinya	Two parent family	Man	Sponsor (m) Wife Daughter (13)	Three	One (eldest)	2 years	9 months	Temporary	No – wish to live more centrally
B15	B13	Sudan	Arabic	Two parent family	Man	Sponsor (m) Wife	Two	One (pre-school)	21 months	9 months	Temporary	Yes

Interviewing approach

Interviews were semi-structured, using an interview schedule (see Annex IS) alongside the Wheel of Life visual tool [6]. Paper copies of the diagram were posted to participants prior to interview. Written instructions translated into their first language (where requested), encouraged them to shade the Wheel of Life diagram prior to the interview to indicate how fulfilled they felt in various areas of their lives and, if they chose to, to add additional segments to the picture. Their completed version of the diagram then served as a guide for discussion in the resulting interview. A completed diagram, shared via WhatsApp with the researcher, is shown to illustrate the process as figure eight. This tool was designed to enable a holistic view of the various aspects of families' lives, whilst exploring the social relationships and connections that were important to them. During the interviews, the team employed 'deep listening' techniques to clarify and confirm meaning (cf Laryea 2016), as part of our commitment to using Interpretative Phenomenological approaches (see for example Wertz 2011; Noon 2018; and Matua and Van Der Wal 2015) in our analysis phase. This involved listening, probing, and explicitly checking our understanding of what our research participants wanted to convey whilst in dialogue with them. In this way, we attempted to move beyond relying on subsequent transcript as the principal means of interpretation.

Figure seven: Blank Wheel of Life (adults)
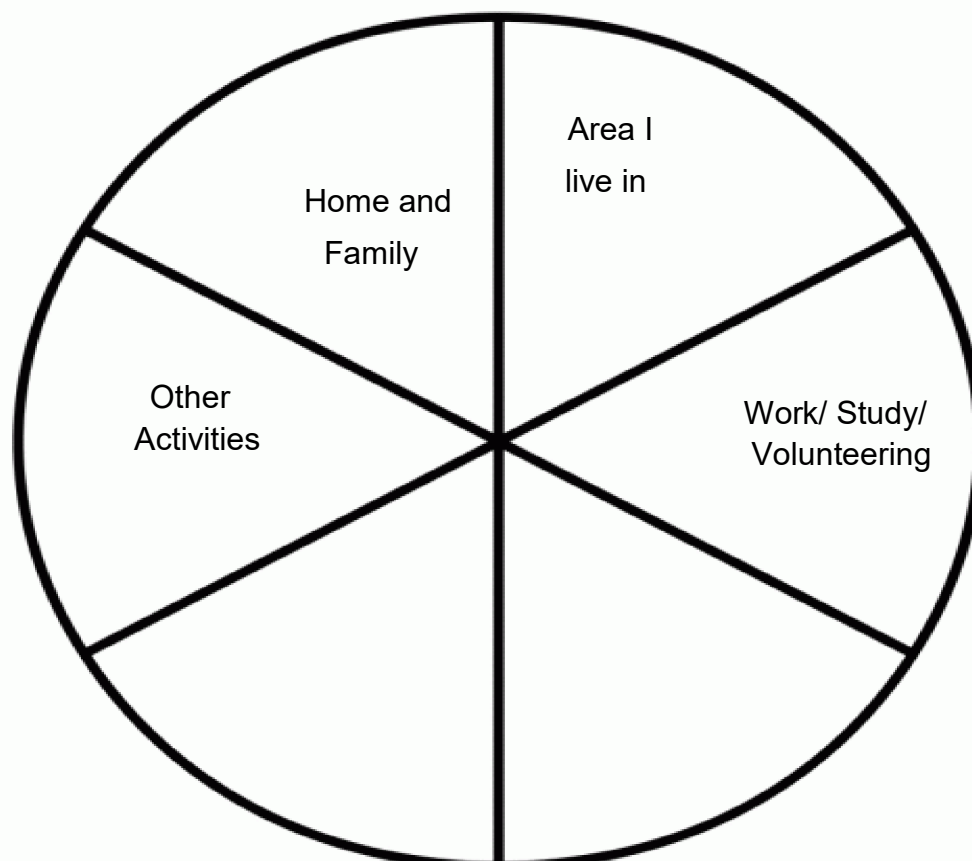
[6] The diagram was amended for children, replacing the work/study/volunteering segment with school/college. Instructions for completion of the wheel were provided in Arabic, Farsi and Tigrinya in addition to English.

Figure eight: completed Wheel of Life (family B13)
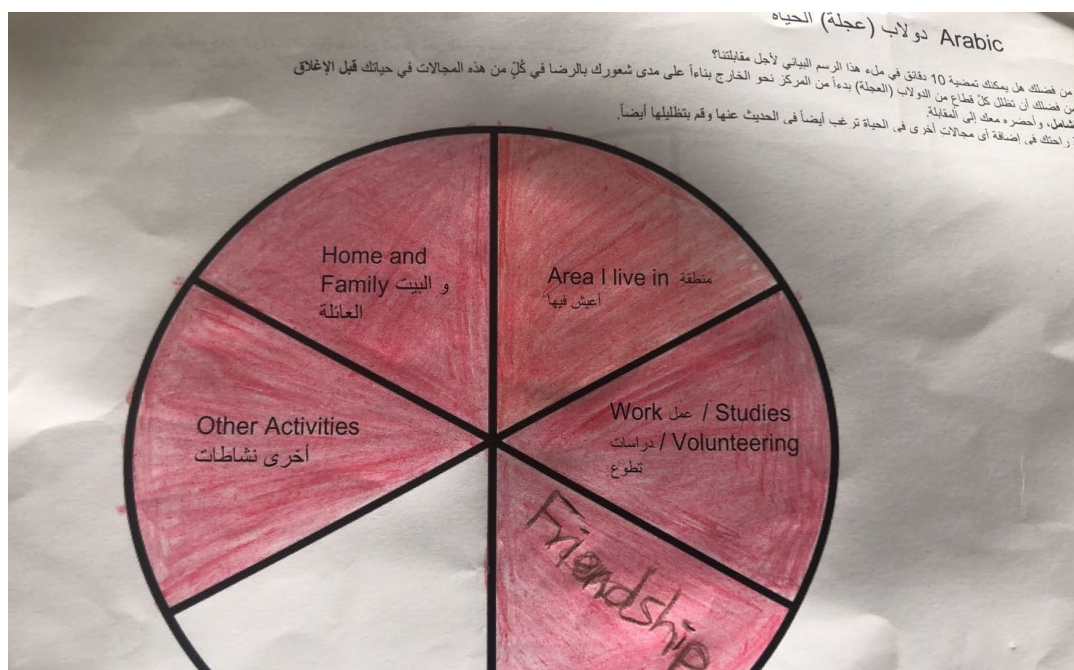
4.5 Limitations

Firstly, whilst our partnership with British Red Cross and Barnardo's provided invaluable insights and access to research participants throughout the project, it does mean that our cohort of participants represents only those refugee families who were in receipt of support from at least one specialist third sector organisation at the time of their participation. Our findings therefore do not represent the experiences of refugees and reunited families who have chosen not to engage with formal integration services or have been unable to do so.

Secondly, remote family interviews were conducted with families living in two large urban sites - Glasgow and Birmingham - and living across a multitude of localities in each city. Glasgow and Birmingham themselves, whilst sharing some characteristics as large, post-industrial urban areas, are not directly comparable contexts. Perhaps most significantly, whilst in Birmingham, 42% of the population are from a Black, Asian or other Minority Ethnic background[7], the proportion of BAME residents in Glasgow is only 12%.[8] Moreover, as integration policy is devolved, Glasgow falls under the Scottish Government's (2018) New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy[9], whilst integration policy Birmingham is under the purview of the Westminster government.   Our observations on place are therefore less specific than we would otherwise have wished.

Thirdly, whilst some of our workshops were conducted directly in Arabic by a bilingual member of the research team, nine of our thirteen family interviews were conducted using an interpreter. We ensured that interpreters received a written

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[7] www.birmingham.gov.uk

[8] https://www.understandingglasgow.com

[9] https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-scots-refugee-integration-strategy-2018-2022/

briefing on interview format and purpose prior to the session and engaged only interpreters working professionally for an interpreting agency. However, it is important to note that the participants' words quoted in our analysis below have already been interpreted and may to some extent have been altered in the interpretation process.

Finally, whilst we actively sought to speak with people from a range of nationalities and family profiles throughout our research activities, the relatively small size of our sample means that our data cannot be deemed fully representative of the diversity of family experience. As regards our family interviews two countries of origin - Iran and Sudan - predominate. This does broadly reflect the service level data as to FRIS beneficiaries but may limit the generalisability of our data somewhat. Our focus on children's experiences in family interviews was to some extent determined by our decision to access participants via Barnardo's, who were contracted only to work with families with children. This means that our interview data does not reflect the experiences of couples without children. Eight of the 35 families who attended our workshops did not have children with them in the UK, however their experiences are less present in our qualitative findings than those of families with children in the household. Finally, the majority of the sponsors who participated in research activities were men. However, we did speak to seven single parent households (five in workshops, two in interviews), all of which were headed by women.

5. The Social Connections App

In chapter four, we outlined our research design. A central element of this was the social connections app, as explained in section 4.2 above. Throughout the lifetime of the project, the app underwent a number of collaborative redevelopments aimed at streamlining the data collection process and enabling caseworkers to benefit from the collected data. Implementing this in a real-time, frontline service delivery environment has provided us with invaluable process learning. In this chapter, we provide more detail on our work with partners to embed the social connections app into service delivery, and resultant changes both to the design of the app itself and our ambitions for its future implementation.

5.1 Design

A key principle of the Social Connections Tool (in which inheres the social connections app) is the privileging of respondents' situated experience. The integration journey bears similar navigations for most refugees, yet the quantity and composition of social resources drawn upon are rooted in the cities, towns, local areas and neighbourhoods that refugees inhabit. The ways in which they draw upon these connections, too, are unique to the families themselves. What is required, then, is a combination of emic and etic approaches to understanding integration. Informed by ethnographic and anthropological methods. The emic / etic, or insider / outsider question refers to the extent to which one set of experiences and accounts is privileged over the other (see Halilovich 2013; Sigona 2014). Whilst an emic approach provides insights into the ways in which reunited refugee families draw upon the social connections available to them, an etic approach is required to identify those connections that are available to but not drawn upon by beneficiaries. Straddling such questions, then, the aim when developing the social connections app was not only to collect data for research but also for the internal monitoring and evaluation of service delivery. And throughout the project the design of the app underwent three substantive revisions.

Based on consultations with lead partner staff and management, the initial design of the app centred around facilitating in-person data collection through electronic devices provided to all local FRIS sites (as outlined in chapter 4: Methods). Feedback from frontline staff was continuously gathered and formed the basis of subsequent design improvements. These were aimed at optimising the data collection process and included the provision of supplementary scripts to local staff around how to inform potential respondents about the research. A FRIS-wide data meet was organised in Birmingham in February to collate feedback across the project and share learning and successful workflows for data collection. A key design improvement emerging out of this was the recommendation to incorporate project information texts into the social connections app itself, thus further lessening the time commitment required of frontline staff in the data collection process.

Substantial Redesign: Remote Data Collection
The onset of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown measures, however, required a radical rethink of the agreed upon data collection method. Face-to-face meetings

with beneficiaries were no longer a possibility and staff feedback suggested there was an opportunity to lessen the contact time between case workers and beneficiaries required to complete the app. We substantively redeveloped the app to enable remote data collection from beneficiaries. Local staff would now be required to share with beneficiaries a secure link through which the latter could complete the social connections survey. New research information and consent material was developed for beneficiaries alongside an explanation of the questions put to them in the social connections app, and separate app guidance material was developed for local staff (AG2). Consultations were also held with FRIS management and local offices over optimising the process for local staff. Individual links were generated for all beneficiaries who were in contact with FRIS within one, two or three months (each at the discretion of local offices) and provided to local offices for communication to beneficiary respondents. The below images illustrate the app's remote data collection capabilities.

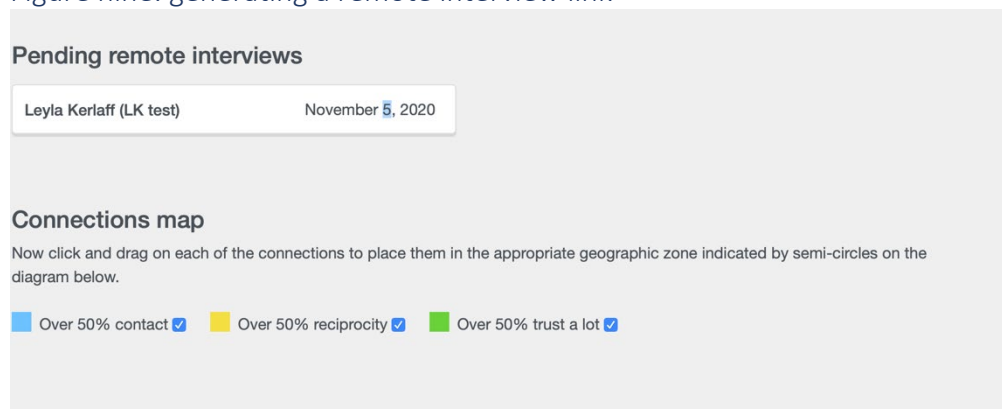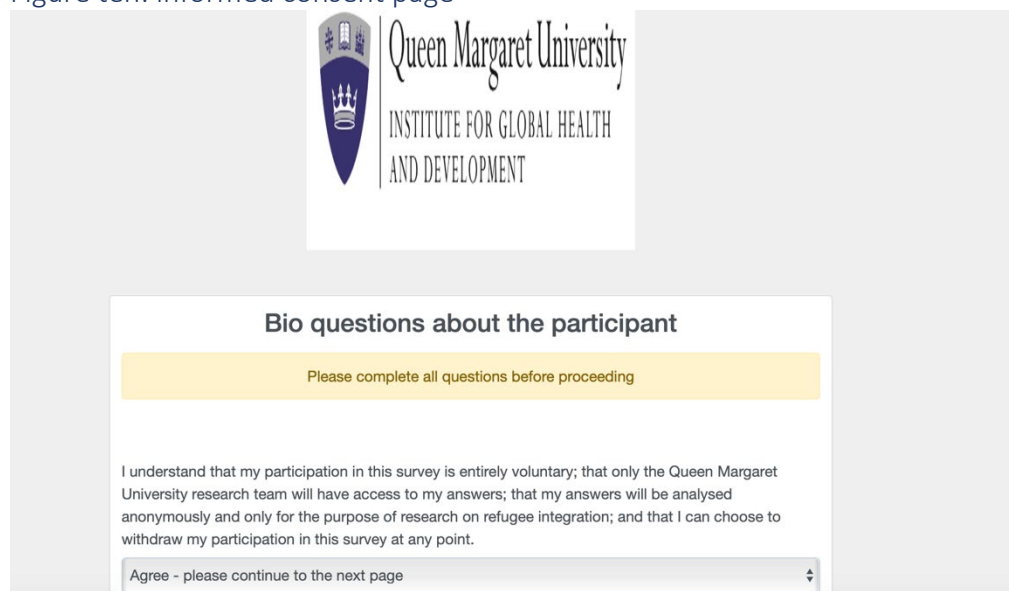Figure nine: generating a remote interview link

Figure ten: informed consent page

5.2 Process Insights

Using a digital app to support research, whilst seeking to embed its use within a casework setting has generated useful operational and practical insights that will inform progress on this in the extension period. We outline these below and summarise these, and the design section above, in table four.

Drawing on local knowledge

The iterative process of participatory workshops followed by consultations with local frontline staff, outlined in the Workshops section: 4.3, is aimed at accessing both the emic and etic perspective in refugee integration. The participatory workshops provided valuable insights into both refugee families' own awareness and use of organisations in their area (the emic perspective) and compared to the frontline workers' awareness of organisations (the etic perspective). The workshops function was primarily to develop the list of connections used in the social connections app, as part of an iterative process to ensure the local relevance of named organisations to the participants in each FRIS site. The workshops were nonetheless also valuable in their own right as an opportunity for the research team to visit each FRIS site, build relationships with frontline staff and meet service users. Meeting staff and service users provided insights far beyond the list of connections, into the specific contexts of each local area, and into the qualitative experiences of service users of accessing services and building connections. Feedback from staff suggested the process was also useful to them in understanding the gap in knowledge of available support between themselves and their service users and initiated conversations about how they could best bridge this gap.

Supporting data collection

As originally configured, operational staff members were required to spend around twenty minutes explaining and setting up the survey for each potential participant. This time commitment was too consequential in the context of the high level of demand placed upon caseworker and project coordinator time in many of the project sites. Prior to the app being re-configured to run remotely, administering a follow-up survey was a challenge for staff and volunteers, who, in many cases found that service users were less available or willing to attend for a face-to-face contact session by the exit interview stage. This is reportedly because service users are often more self-sufficient by this stage having had their urgent short-term needs largely met with the support of the project.

Overall, it is clear that to realise the ideal synergy between data collection and service delivery, using the app should wherever possible be directly integrated into casework interventions, so that staff and participants are immediately aware of its utility to them and so are far more likely to propose, complete and make use of it as part of a structured programme of work. There are previous examples in this field of data collection being integrated into the casework management systems used by operational staff (Strang et al. 2015, 2016). This avoids duplication of data entry and, when combined with ongoing engagement with staff around the implications of emerging data patterns, can facilitate more consistent commitment to gathering the data. It also, in the longer term, realises the ambitions of the app as a valuable tool for practice.

Partnership working

As with every aspect of any programme, the outputs of each partner are reliant to greater or lesser degree on the other programme partners. The reach of the FRIS programme is both a challenge and an opportunity: an opportunity in that the target numbers of supported families (900 people, as identified in the AMIF funding grant) offers the potential to collect and analyse data from a large number of people, thereby providing a robust data set. However, the sheer volume of arriving families, in some locations more than others, compounded the challenges outlined above of allocating staff time to facilitate data collection, as did onerous reporting and evaluation data requirements from the funder over which neither partner had any control. Working closely with named contacts, or 'App Champions' in each project area was a successful model to build relationships between the research and service delivery teams.

Table four: summary of app design and process developments

	Considerations	Measures introduced
Participants	English language ability	App instructions and questions translated into three key languages identified by service provider: Arabic, Farsi and Tigrinya.
	Literacy	Assessment by service provider staff who can offer support to complete survey if literacy is an issue.
	Experiencing crisis – housing/finance/health	Flexibility around schedule for completing the survey, also mitigated by remote version which allows participants to complete survey at time most suitable to them.
	Access to digital devices / Wi-Fi	App can be completed offline. Every service office provided with dedicated tablet to ensure access to a device.
Operational Staff	Understanding purpose and format of app	Site workshops – online and in person – with key operational staff. Ongoing liaison with named contacts by email/phone.
	Resourcing data collection	Training for volunteers/new staff. Discussions with managers. Development of remote completion capability.
	Embedding social connections maps into practice	Enabling production of individual maps to shape discussions with individuals/families. Highlighting potential for maps to shape casework interventions to benefit of staff and clients. Training and workshops with research team.
	Maintaining data collection momentum	Cross-team 'Data Meets' to discuss best practice and compare findings on local/national gaps in service.

5.3 Next Steps

During the extension period, FRIS teams will be using the app to gather information to support service beneficiaries through the app's remote data collection capabilities. Support to embed the app further into everyday service delivery activities will be provided by a dedicated Research Assistant post from within the QMU team, and a quantitative analysis of the comprehensive data for these clients will be reported on at the end of the extension period.

The focus in the extension period will be building upon the app's capability to support service delivery. Key to this will be the improvements made to the app's 'geo map' capability over the first project period. This provides frontline staff with a live analysis and representation of survey results across the local beneficiary population. figure eleven is a visual representation of results from the beneficiary population in Cardiff, whilst figure twelve represents the results an individual beneficiary respondent from Cardiff.   Both are visual representations of the various connections identified during workshops as important to service beneficiaries. The colour-coded highlighting system shows the frequency of contact and levels of trust and reciprocity, where applicable, in relation to each connection.

As such, these maps can highlight gaps in connections – for example, services that although nominally available, are not being used which, as in the examples below, would be left blank. Services or people that are used often and were well trusted would, conversely, be shaded in the relevant colour. Regular checking and reference to these maps could be a means for service providers such as British Red Cross to identify and address, through advocacy and partnership working, gaps in city-wide or national provision. For individual respondents – in this case, refugee families – seeing and comparing one's personal maps across different time periods would offer a means to measure and assess progress towards personal or family goals.

Figure eleven : social connections map (Cardiff)

Figure twelve : social connections map (Leicester)

As the extension period begins, we will explore with site teams the best ways that these individual and cohort-wide maps can support and inform service delivery, to the benefit of all those who use the FRIS.

6. Qualitative findings

In this section, we describe our approach to analysing of the two qualitative datasets: eight social connections mapping workshops and thirteen family interviews. We then set out our findings as to the context in which social connections are formed and the role they play for the reunited refugee families we spoke to in their personal integration journey as individuals and as a family unit. The findings draw out participants' emic perspectives on their priorities as they strive to feel settled as a family in Birmingham or Glasgow, and the people that enabled that process of integrating into the area. They also draw out their hopes and aspirations for the future. The implications of these findings for our understanding of the role of social connections in integration are discussed is chapter seven.

6.1 Approach to Analysis

Workshops
Whilst the primary aim of the connections mapping workshops was to identify locally specific connections for the purposes of the social connections app, discussions with participants generated qualitative insights into the integration experiences of refugee families. Our analysis and collation of these insights occurred in three principal stages:

- Each team member produced written field notes immediately after the workshops in each location, noting key points from discussions with families and service provider staff.
- We reviewed these as a team, discussing and agreeing on common themes and ensuring a common interpretation of the group dynamics at work in each site.
- From these, we drew together an initial set of thematic insights, broadly coded under a set of headings.

We have, where relevant, drawn some of these insights into the contextual and thematic analysis below, labelled as 'workshop insight – city location' for clarity.

Family interviews
Eleven of the thirteen families consented to having their interviews audio recorded. These recordings were sent to professional agencies for transcription. Each transcript was then reviewed and corrected as required by the interviewer. Corrections mainly pertained to words that transcribers had mis-heard due to accent or inflection from participants and interpreters who are non-native speakers of English. In addition to the transcripts, researchers used an agreed template to record field notes immediately after each interview, capturing not only the words spoken but their impressions of family dynamics, any technical or linguistic issues encountered and other relevant observations. For the two families who did not consent to having their words recorded, these field notes are the primary record of their interviews.

In analysing the resulting notes and transcripts, we drew inspiration from interpretive phenomenology approaches (Matua and Van Der Wal 2015; Noon 2018; Laryea 2016 and Wertz 2011). Individually, and then together as a team, we took each

family in turn and approached the analysis by reviewing each family as a distinct phenomenon or case. We considered what narrative emerged from each family and the key issues relating to their perspective. This approach enabled us to develop a holistic understanding of each family unit and avoided the risk of placing too much reliance on our interpretation of a static text after the event. It was only after this initial analysis that we proceeded to a more traditional inductive coding phase. We went on to compare across the family interviews, using our agreed understandings of each family interview to build up a list of themes. We then manually coded each interview against these.

6.2 Family Bonds

This section explores the extent to which the family bond was prioritised and provided a secure base from which individual family members were able to widen their social networks. It analyses the role of the family bond in facilitating integration and the factors affecting this in our sample of reunited refugee families.

Reuniting and settling in

As shown in table four above, all of our family interview participants had been reunited with their families within the last year (families had arrived anywhere between five months and a year prior to interview). For eleven out of the thirteen families this meant that a female spouse and children had joined their father/husband – the male sponsor - in the UK within that time. These families had been separated for between 9 months and 2 years 9 months. Both the remaining two families were single mother households; in the case of Family G2, the two children aged 12 and 18 had joined their mother in the UK after over four years of separation. In Family G10 the eldest child (13 years old) had joined her mother and two younger sisters in the UK after nine years spent apart. All families expressed joy at being reunited and, for some, lockdown was even perceived as a positive time to reconnect as a family and cement bonds between themselves (discussed more fully in the Impact of COVID-19 Restrictions section: 2.3).

The priority for most families at this early stage of being reunited was to be together, be safe and for the children to be settled in the home and at school. There was a strong sense that in this early transition stage of settlement as a family, the focus was on the immediate stability of the family and that it was important to take time to consolidate these bonds before addressing longer term aspirations for life as a family in the UK.

> *Oh, the future ... actually, you know, to be, to live in safe place I think is the important thing. If I compare myself when I have a problem to come back to Gaza Strip the life was like black, there was no hope, but I remember when I got the decision from Home Office maybe this is the best time … you know, because my family still not have decision to come...But because they are fine in Palestine but for me at least I can live here then I can fight for my family. So I remember this day it was so happy for me and now just try to do everything in correct way to get the better life for my family* (G9, male sponsor)

> *After my family arrived we feel better, we feel more secure* (G3, male

sponsor).

> *My main focus here is my family. I've got very, very good – you know, because for a long time I was away from the family and I enjoy, you know, my family again* (B15, male sponsor).

It is worth emphasising that the integration pathway is not linear and noting that not all families in the sample followed the trajectory of male sponsor bringing his family to join him in the UK. Whilst all those pre-arriving male sponsors had to readjust to family life after a long time of separation, the period of adjustment was arguably more challenging for the single mothers in our sample. Apart from the inherent challenges of managing family life as a single parent, the two families in the interview cohort who had experienced the longest separation were both headed by single mothers. The mother and her two children from Family G2 (aged 12 and 18) had been separated from each other for more than four years, whilst the mother from Family G10 had been separated from her eldest daughter (aged 13) for nine years; meaning in both cases the families had to reconnect at significantly different developmental stages of their children's lives. One crucial challenge hinted at by the only single mother who participated in an interview was her desire to make up for lost time in instilling certain values and behaviours in their children.

> *I keep telling her that there's some things that you have to do. You don't want to do this job, but you can't just say you don't want to do everything. You just have to learn how to do it. […] But I assume because I wasn't around to look after her, to know you know so, so many things that I trying to make her adapt to now. And then to be able to pull her mind out. Sometimes you want to say something, you don't know who to talk to. Your [i.e. her daughter's] mum is [was] not there to talk to, it's really hard. So, I know we'll get there* (G10, female sponsor).

Meeting the family's needs

Having reunited and begun to re-establish the family bond, parents were (unsurprisingly) primarily concerned that their children felt safe and happy, and then aspired for them to: make friends; engage them in exercise and activities that stimulate them and "keep them busy". The upmost priority was to secure a place for their children in school, seeing this as one of the most immediate priorities in getting the family established, alongside meeting basic family needs such as access to healthcare and food. In the words of one participant:

> *When I talk about settlement, that means I got my children to go to school and we registered with the GP, with the dentist, we know about the area* (G8, male sponsor).

There was some evidence of the responsibility of meeting children's needs falling primarily on mothers, who may sacrifice their own needs in order to prioritise their children's wellbeing, as in the example below:

> *It's just, I don't always thinking about myself, I'm thinking about the children most of the time, just what they wish to be doing* (G10, female sponsor).

Nonetheless, in two-parent families this was not consistently the case. Indeed, in some families, the father, as previously arrived sponsor, appeared to take a very active role in looking after the family's wellbeing, to the extent that they were explicitly putting their own goals and aspirations on hold or compromising them in order to prioritise their wife and children's more immediate needs.

> *Part of the plan also is my wife is to start English classes, so we have to compromise – me doing my stuff and she can join the college or the community class to learn English* (G8, male sponsor).

> *And sometimes the last few months they try to push me to apply for Project Coordinator, so that will be the Project Coordinator for many language not just Arabic. So if I apply for Project Coordinator then maybe I can have permanent contract. But for me, I'm still need time, especially for my family to settle* (G9, male sponsor).

Further observations as to gendered roles and dynamics are noted below.

Extended Family

Many people had left behind members of their extended families in order to come to the UK. The Immigration Rules in the UK only extend the right to family reunion to partners and children under 18 (see footnote 1) and a few arriving families were acutely missing family back in their home country.

> *I am missing my mum much [...] she's in Sudan. I keep calling and 'how are you?' and she was taking care of my kids, so they used to sleep with her much of the time. Whatever they love to cook, whatever she's cooking for them, so here, when I came, when I tell them I cannot do this thing, [they say] 'Call grandma and ask her how to do it'* (B4, female spouse)

> *I miss my parents and my sisters as I don't have any brothers, I have only three sisters but it's the fact that I know that I cannot see them but it really makes me sad thinking about them* (B6, male sponsor).

This was evidence too in some of our workshops. In Cardiff, one elderly lady became emotional as she recounted missing her grown-up children back in Iran, and spoke of the difficulties of even obtaining visitor visas for them to ever come to see her in her new home in Wales. This 'enforced nuclearisation' of families meant that even though reunited, many family units were still living with the reality of separation (see also Wachter and Gulbas 2018).

Four out of the thirteen families interviewed told us that they had extended family members living in the UK, and all but one family had regular contact with these family members. In this latter case, it seemed that the interviewee, a single mother, had initially relied on her brother for accommodation, but circumstances had led to them have little contact more recently. Family B14 had extended family from both sponsor and spouse's side living across various locations around the UK including in Birmingham, where they lived. This family were in fact staying with a cousin on holiday at the time of interview, and confirmed that they drew on their extended

family, who had been lived in the UK longer than they had, for advice and help to navigate systems.

> *Ideally they do help us and then, like, 'You have to do like this' or 'You need to do like this', this is the way how they help us* (B14, female spouse).

Similarly, a single mother who was a workshop participant in Birmingham laughed as she explained that her brother, who had been in the UK for twenty years, was now so British that he had forgotten their shared cultural norms around offering food when visiting people as a gesture of hospitality. She identified him as a key connection for integration, whom she regularly went to for assistance and advice as *"he knows his rights, he knows the rules here"*. This echoes connections with Ryan's (2011) description of 'vertical bonding connections':

> "Family members…who had lived in the host country longer than they had…could be considered vertical bonding social capital because of their high level of integration into [host] society" (Ryan 2011: 52)

It was evident that, for those few families who did have extended family living in the UK, they were (or had been) a great source of comfort and support. In one case it was family who provided a place to stay initially, and in another extended family were a constant source of support and advice. In contrast, those families who did not have extended family in the UK, particularly those who did not speak English, missed their families back home more acutely, with some turning to friends and keyworkers to fill that deep bonding connection, as discussed later in this section of the report.

Connectedness of Sponsor

In adjusting to life in the UK, it seemed implicit that the level of trust between husband and wife (in those families where parents were reuniting as well as their children) had a significant impact on the cohesiveness of the family as the whole and, depending on where the sponsor was on their integration journey, on the pace of moving through the initial settlement phase. In those families where it seemed the couple were close (for example, it was observed that they sat together and answered interview questions in a unified way, or suggested that they agreed with each other on most things), interviewees told us of instances whereby the sponsor had 'shared' their existing connections in the UK, with the bond between them in fact acting as the primary bridge to friends and community activities.

> **Spouse**: *Yes, I got in touch with some Sudanese community members.*
> **Interviewer**: *How did you get in touch with them?*
> **Spouse**: *Through my husband* (B5, female spouse).

In another example, a husband had actively sought out friends for his wife, who was herself housebound, by telling the mother of one of his children's nursery classmates about his wife and asking if she would visit with her (Family G13). These examples resonate with the idea of family cohesion as a protective factor for developing a sense of belonging in wider society (Robertson 2020). In contrast, one arriving spouse noted that:

My husband has a lot of friends but like most of them they don't have families so they're not just visiting us in our house, so they are just friends outside. They're only like men together (B6, female spouse).

In this example, the husband's connections were less available to the family, as they were relationships specific to his time living in Birmingham before his family arrived, made with people who did not have families of their own in the country. This example speaks to the evidence that sponsors tend to have more social relationships upon which to draw for support, but these may be difficult to share with other family members, most notably women (Marsden and Harris 2015), and to the importance of taking into account not only the existence of connections, but family members' actual, and possible unequal access to these, due to factors such as age and gender (Anthias 2007). This should not automatically be taken to imply that women lack their own pathways to connection. For example, in our workshops, one woman told us that connections were made not with their husbands and their (male) friends, but in contexts where women could be together:

We don't talk to our husbands, they work outside, we [female spouses] *talk amongst ourselves* (Workshop participant, Belfast).

However, where these pathways themselves were lacking, arriving spouses, most especially women could be at a disadvantage. In another family where the husband did not emerge as offering any type of connection outside the home, the spouse seemed very isolated and said she did not feel that she or her daughters were safe in the area they lived in. She was also struggling to navigate and access services despite her husband having arrived ten months prior to the rest of the family. A complex interplay of individual and contextual factors may be at play here which contribute to a sense of greater isolation and vulnerability in this family than in some others. The husband did not wish to be interviewed, and his wife told us he was not employed, whilst she felt under pressure from the JobCentre to take cleaning jobs. Other 'protective' factors which might have helped the family to feel more secure (for example, friendships in their local area) were also absent. These are discussed further in the Friendships and Trust section: 6.5.

Gender Roles and Responsibilities

Some families explicitly raised issues relating to adapting to different gender roles according to UK norms and values, and also adjusting the balance of their childcare and domestic responsibilities in order to allow the spouse time to study or work (in addition to the sponsor). One couple laughed together about how the wife would need to spend less time in the kitchen to allow time for her to study or work.

Sponsor: *It's not like our country especially she started studying and if she starts working full time I told her this system will not work. So especially sometimes some food it takes about two to three hours to prepare, it's a long time. So just now I told her try to focus, don't just spend time in the kitchen. Just try to spend a little time.*

Spouse: *I like kitchen, I like cooking* (G9, male sponsor, female spouse).

This echoes evidence from other studies that suggest spouses themselves may undergo processes of adaptation from solid gender differentiations in countries of origin to the more fluid and open gender roles in the UK or other destination countries (Choi 2018; Grillo 2008; Lokot 2020). For this family, the seemingly strong bond between spouses could indicate that they have a secure base from which to negotiate these processes of adaptation as a family. That is not to say that there would not be bumps and conflict along the way in this negotiation process, as there are in all marital and familial relationships; this example of negotiating childcare responsibilities is a case in point:

> *I was having headache, I was telling their father to take them to the market. He said, 'No, no, I cannot control them in the street" I said, "Why? I was controlling them for two years there alone and sleeping and wake up and everything. It is small'* (B4, female spouse).

This negotiation and adaptation of gender roles came to the fore when the same mother recounted challenging her daughter's desire to go to a girl's only school as she feared being teased by boys in a mixed school.

> *She was saying, 'Oh, the boys in the class, maybe there will be much boys, they will make for me teasing, like that.' I said, 'See? The boys like your brothers and everywhere like when you look – and there is much, like girls are like boys, it's equal. And they are like your brothers, your friends, like you can talk with them, take from them the homework, read with them. Nothing is like that.' And I feel like she was enforcing us to put her in girls' school. […]. She needs that thing, she needs to be more confident, that is* (B4, female spouse).

Nonetheless, it is women who are generally more limited in their opportunities to participate in life beyond the home due to childcare commitments, particularly when the children are young. More often than not, it is still the mother who shoulders the larger responsibility for looking after the children and home in the UK, as in other countries. This speaks to the evidence that suggests women are less likely to access formal English learning provision due to their childcare commitments (Marsden and Harris 2015; Refugee Action 2017; Sim and Laughlin 2014; Strang et al. 2016).

> *I didn't get any chance to study, to join any college or classes, and even my children are still at home* (B5, female spouse).

For this sample of families then, the extent to which there was a close and supportive bond between the family members could be said to be one factor in instilling confidence to branch out and foster relationships outside the private realm of one's own home. This is discussed more fully in the Friendships and Trust section: 6.5. Additionally, the feeling of acceptance and belonging outside the home, in the street, neighbourhood and even city where families were living was conditional on many factors which are discussed in the Place section: 6.4.

6.3 Children and School

This section turns to discuss children and young people's particular priorities for integration from their own perspectives. It looks at how the integration process is mediated through the children's social connections, made both through their parents and independently from them. The findings in this section draw on interviews with eight young people from the thirteen families interviewed. Across the thirteen families interviewed, twenty-two children were registered in school and fourteen were still waiting for their place. The young people, in turn, were aged between 12 and 18, five were boys and three were girls.

School as an accelerator of integration

Schools are a critical space for the formation of social relationships (Sim and Laughlin 2014), both for pupils and their parents. Correa-Velez et al. (2010), for instance, argue that schools are the first spaces outside of a family context where refugee children develop a sense of belonging. Younger children's accounts of schooling were remarkably illustrative of the various levels at which schooling accelerated their integration journeys. These benefits became obvious even for recently arriving children, like a young boy from Family G8 who had only been going to school for less than two months before lockdown measures were introduced (see section 6.8: Reunited Families in Lockdown). In this short period, he had already made friends, and his account of these is illustrative of the multiple ways in which the formation of relationships through school facilitates the adaptation process:

> *Interviewer: And how did you find each other in the school … how did you come to be friends?*
> *Child: It's just by chance I came to know he's from Yemen and I started to talk to him.*
> *Interviewer: You said they're helping you with your English, so what kinds of things do you do together that helps with your English-learning?*
> *Child: He interprets for me sometimes. When the teacher was talking, he used to interpret for me* (G8, male child aged 12).

For this child from Family G8, school was where he met and became friends with peers who had navigated similar paths and whose experiences he could draw upon.

> *I started to learn from them (…) they came here about three years ago – so their English is good* (G8, male child aged 12).

He enjoyed his morning walks to school and spoke with understated pride about how he had even found a shortcut. We understood that these routine walks to school, combined with the relationships he was forging in school itself, signified an evolving sense of belonging. He himself illustrated this evolution best: *"I felt I'm a bit a stranger, because my language is different,"* and school was the primary locus through which he was becoming less of a stranger: *"[It's] good. I'm a bit a stranger and I'm learning."* A slightly older boy, aged 14, from Family G7, also spoke of how the friends he made at school helped bridge the initial language barrier and indeed facilitate a sense of belonging beyond the school. They would help *"when I wasn't sure about something in the subjects,"* they were *"friendly"* and *"treating [him] very well."* School, in short, made him happy.

Older children who had already navigated the terrain that the child from Family G8 was currently negotiating, described to us the ways in which school enabled belonging in a wider sense to the community. The account of one 18-year-old, from Family G2, was indicative of how being in school facilitated integration beyond the confines of the school itself. Despite only reuniting with his family at the start of the school year, he had already made friends in school with whom he would now go out for dinners, play football and indeed computer games. School was a means for him to achieve his ambition of being a professional footballer: his love for maths and sciences provided was a backup plan in case a football career did not work out, but we also understood that being in school had provided him confidence outside of it. He described, for instance, how he one day went to speak to a group of same-age children who he had noticed would practice in the park – *"they're an actual amateur football team!"* The coach had told him that it cost £30 a month to be part of the team, but after explaining his situation, our interviewee was invited to take part for free.

But the benefits of being in school extended well beyond the experiences of children. It allowed parents, too, to progress. Indeed, children are argued to be the primary agents of integration for the family unit as a whole (Spicer 2008), and whilst they experience schooling differentially by age (Eve 2010) these experiences impact the integration journeys of their parents too – evidenced by the family-level disruptions that come with moving neighbourhoods and transferring to new schools (cf Bourgonje 2010). In this light, the sponsor and father from Family G8 spoke with pride about how his son had received birthday cards from classmates. Another recently arrived spouse described how she enjoyed walking her daughter to school, but also how these provided an opportunity to exercise and meet new people:

> *I was taking my daughter to school, you know, and I was bringing her back, I mean, I was walking to school, so a bit of exercise again. I was seeing people and sometimes they were smiling to me, just give me a bit of, you know, a boost. But, at the same time, I was going out sometimes with my husband, shopping, I was going to Tesco to shop for food, so I was happy* (G3, female spouse).

Beyond everyday joys and civilities, though, we understood from the mother of Family G10, a single parent sponsor, how children's successful integration into school encouraged their parents to extend their own horizons. Her children were already in school, and she was now focusing on improving their quality of life outside of it. By her own admission, *"I don't always think about myself, I'm thinking about the children most of the time, just what they wish to be doing."* One of her children wanted to get into gymnastics, not something the single-mother and sponsor of Family G10 could currently afford. She described her own career plans and future ambitions in terms of being able to afford the extra-curricular activities her children were displaying an interest in.

> *Interviewer: And just finally, [name of sponsor], I just wanted to ask about your hopes for the future. What would you like to change in your life, generally, for the future?*

> *Sponsor: Yeah [what] I want, yeah? Get job, be satisfied, and then go to the college – I want to pass, I want to make sure I do well and pass, and then to be able to you know – my children, help them and then if I had my way, the community as well.*
> *Interviewer: So you're looking forward to being able to provide for your children more and –*
> *Sponsor: More and more and more, you know that you want to buy something, you'd be like, "Oh, I can't afford it," and maybe want something, and it's not really the best thing for me, I don't like it. When they want something that they need it, I should be there for them to provide for them. Not waiting till you know getting paid at the end of the month* (G10, female sponsor).

The Disadvantages of Not Being in School

The accounts and experiences of families who were facing difficulties registering their children in school, mean whilst, were diametrically opposed to the above, further illustrating the extent to which experiences of integration pivot around school. Difficulties and delays in finding a place in school meant the child from Family B6 was limited to the confines of first a hostel, then temporary accommodation. Not being in school also meant he could not yet begin to explore how to achieve his extra-curricular ambitions of being a professional footballer. The combination of these related stressors led to the exacerbation of his health problems. The father and sponsor from Family B5 similarly spoke of his young children's unhappiness at not being able to access schooling yet. But it was an older child from Family B12, who spoke most clearly and eloquently about the emergent disadvantages of not being in school. She had arrived a few months before her 16th birthday and was unable to find a school place:

> *I haven't been able to register in a school yet. And it seems I no longer have the choice to register in school. I was a great student in [previous country]. I'm a bit sad about this. I'm supposed to be in year 10… Here, at some point one school said I'd have to start in year 11, but they didn't say I can't join. We asked around but haven't been able to find out much about this. I was 15 when I arrived, but now … I'm 16 and it seems I can't go to school anymore, it'll have to be college. I want to specialise in health and science, but nobody is speaking to me about this. What should I study? What should I do if I want to be a doctor? In [previous country] people would give advice even if they didn't know anything; here, no advice. No advice on colleges, either* (B12, female child, age 16).

Especially for older children, we understood that difficulties accessing schooling had profound impacts beyond the present. All the child from Family B12 cared for was; "*my education. I want to get a good offer from a good university and play basketball*" (B12, female child, age 16).

The implications of present difficulties on future possibilities, especially revolving around schooling and education interrupted the integration journeys of parents, too. It was the limited agency parents had in solving these problems that seemed to affect them most. The mother and spouse from Family B12 explained the intricacies:

Registering the kids at school has been really difficult. We have had lots of problems with the school (…) We were in a hostel for our first three months here, and the hostel address is only a temporary address, and now the home is a bit of a temporary address too. Just one school has talked to us, they said they put one of my daughters on the waiting list but never called back (…) nobody said anything about the second daughter (…) now that she's 16, they are telling us she no longer qualifies for school but should instead go to college and won't be able to graduate from school (B12, female spouse).

The parents from Family B5, who were having similar problems registering their children in school, had been going to the schools in their attempts to understand where the process was stuck. And it was not only the children who were 'stuck.' It was difficult, we understood, for the parents to think of and focus on their own integration journeys so long as their children were not well settled. The mother and spouse illustrated the corrosive disadvantages of not being able to access school best:

I have the same problem as my husband. We are facing the same problems together. We are wanting my kids to be able to go to the GP and in relation to their British school registration. That's all the problems we have together. It's not that I have my own problems (B5, female spouse).

Elsewhere, whilst both parents from Family B6 had spoken to us of their own problems, these all paled into insignificance in the face of those of their children. The father and sponsor from Family B4's account perhaps provides insight into why parents' problems always came second:

As they study, they should go as usual [progress well] because I know that now they need more help to complete their study. Because I don't want them to face any problem regarding their study (B4, male sponsor).

6.4 Place

Bearing in mind the specific cohort of people we spoke to (reunited refugee families) and the particular context of the cities they were living in (Glasgow and Birmingham) as outlined in the methods chapter, this section analyses the role of place in building relationships with others and in the wider process of integration. Using the Wheel of Life as a tool, the interviews explored how participants felt about "the area you live in." This was used to refer to their local neighbourhood and also, by some, to the city of Birmingham or Glasgow. On analysing the emerging themes, key findings suggest that the most important conditions perceived to make an area more conducive to making positive social connections were feeling safe and comfortable and being close to amenities. Furthermore, relationships with others in the local area and within the city were central to participants' experience of place. Here we draw on Spicer's (2008) theory of including and excluding neighbourhoods to draw out the specific characteristics and feel of an area that was perceived to offer opportunities to forge closer friendships.

Absence of Conflict and Insecurity

A number of participants described the area they were living as peaceful, quiet, comfortable or clean. Expanding on this, participants compared the area they were living to previous areas they had been housed in the same city or in other parts of the UK, explaining for example that it was less of an industrial area or felt safer and was therefore a better residential area for families:

> *It's nice, it's comfortable, a very nice area, it's for families. That area is not for my family before when I am staying there"* (B4, male sponsor).

> *I feel very comfortable. The area is clean and nice and people are peaceful* (G8, male child aged 12).

More than just the literal quiet of an area, the 'comfort' of a place referred to the absence of *"struggle", "trouble"* (G7, male sponsor) or anything *"fearful"* (B14, female spouse), suggesting that for most families, feeling safe and secure in an area were paramount. In some cases, sponsors had experienced anti-social behaviour and racism in areas they had lived in prior to their families joining them in the UK. This highlights the importance of safety as a premise or facilitator for the integration process, alongside the stability of being in a permanent home and so chimes with the key domains of integration identified in Ager and Strang's (2008) Indicators of Integration Framework – safety and stability and housing (see also Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019).

Conversely, those who described the area in negative terms recounted particular instances of anti-social behaviour including drug dealing and threatening behaviour which made the family feel unsafe.

> *The area is not good anyway, I've had some people that they have to come and they knock on my door in the midnight, pressing my buzzer. I called police twice. The children were so scared* (G10, female sponsor).

> *It's not a very good area. It's pretty rough, actually. When we moved into this temporary house, we didn't have any knowledge of the area. There's a big drug problem here, lots of drug deals taking place. People yell, people are often drunk* (B12, female spouse).

This resonates with findings from Spicer's (2008) research into including and excluding neighbourhoods where children and parents similarly compared safe and hostile local spaces (Spicer 2008). It also speaks to evidence to suggest safe places are associated with cleanliness and purity compared to their 'dirtier' counterparts (Douglas 2005 and Campkin and Cox 2007).

Close Amenities

A key factor in how happy family members felt about living in the area was the distance to their children's schools, shops, parks and community activities. People felt happy when they perceived there to be lots going on in the area. In the words of one participant, who enjoyed the area he lived in:

> *Actually, we were quite happy before lockdown, for somebody who is interested in different activities there is much going on in the community so there is something to do all the time* (G7, male sponsor).

Conversely, one female sponsor who had been moved to several different areas during her 9.5 years in the country (as an asylum seeker for much of this time) described one particularly "*isolating*" area where she had been housed:

> *I wanted to go back to Manchester at that time as well, because that place was really isolating – nobody to play with, it's only park, no libraries, nothing there* (G10, female sponsor).

Similarly, other participants described their experience of an area as positive when *"everything is accessible,"* i.e. they could access services, appropriate places to shop and play whilst several others described the negative impact of being unable to do so:

> *Yeah, the area is very nice, we find the food – halal food – there is many shops near to our area here. The GP, my GP is here also and there is a park* (B4, male sponsor).

Even in cases where the family described the area as a *"good area,"* being far from amenities was considered to be a major drawback:

> *The area I'm living in now is a quiet area but it's so far from the bus station, from the shops and especially halal shops* (B5, male sponsor).

The suggestion is that the proximity of amenities is important to families not only in meeting their immediate and practical needs, but (perhaps more so) in accessing valuable opportunities to interact and start to build relationships with other people in the area. Women in particular highlighted the social aspect of going to the local shops, and many families saw this as an opportunity for an outing and to get some exercise. A number of spouses described enjoying going to the shops alone, or with their families and even in one case, returning to an area they had previously lived in just to say hello to someone they used to speak to in the local supermarket. This finding resonates strongly with Feld (1981) who suggests that places such as shops, schools and parks that people organise their daily lives around provide essential "foci" for social interaction and can even 'institutionally perform much of the "work" required to sustain strong friendships.' In the words of one participant who was keen to move out of the area they were currently in:

> *Yes, so just to move to the area which is more close to the different facilities. Probably, I'm not sure, but maybe just near the centre where there are more facilities, it would give us more opportunity to meet people or to socialise, even if we are somewhere near* (G3, female spouse).

These foci and resulting connections can in turn enable progress along functional paths of integration. One workshop participant in Plymouth recounted obtaining paid work through his interactions with a shopkeeper in the city: He had noticed a restaurant with 'halal' written in Arabic script on the window, which encouraged him

to go in and connect with the shop owner who later offered him work as a delivery driver. Similarly, one sponsor in our interview cohort told us that his wife planned to build a business selling Sudanese bakery products to local halal shopkeepers having already built connections with them through being a customer:

> *Because she got this relationship with some halal shops because she used to go regularly to get our stuff, so she noticed that there are many Sudanese and Arab people and they need some kind of Sudanese-baked kind of biscuits and stuff. So she talked to them and they said, 'OK, welcome, if you do something*

In both instances, shared language, culture or religious affiliation were all important in enabling this productive connection to be made.

In addition to shared public spaces, a facilitator for interacting with neighbours was also the opportunity to meet in shared private spaces such as the stairwell or lift in the building, or in a shared garden. The COVID-19 pandemic had a particularly negative impact on the opportunity to meet neighbours due to physical distancing restrictions and the anxiety some families felt about meeting neighbours in shared spaces. This was particularly acute in high rise buildings. However, at least one child spoke of playing with their neighbours of a similar age in the shared garden during lockdown. This was just one example where children had acted as the catalyst for reunited families to make connections with their neighbours through their children playing together in the garden, street or local playground. The role of children in accelerating social relationships is discussed in the Children and School section: 6.3.

Relationship with Neighbours

Unsurprisingly, families' perceptions of the local area were also largely shaped by relationships with neighbours. Whether or not participants felt that they were able to build positive relationships with their neighbours depended on a number of factors including: 1) the opportunities available for meaningful interactions with them, 2) how friendly and open to establishing a relationship they were perceived to be, and 3) how much they felt they had in common with them. It should also be acknowledged that the participants' own perceptions of whether the area was suitable for them and provided the necessary conditions for progressing on their integration journey may be in part dependent on how stable they felt in their accommodation, and how well established their family was in the local area (e.g. whether their children were in school and how active the family was in local activities and groups). The data suggests that building relationships with people locally not only requires the right conditions but is also a process that takes time.

In terms of building relationships with their neighbours, a number of participants spoke of how important it was to feel a sense of friendly acknowledgement and welcome or "friendly recognition" (Barwick 2017: 418) in the street:

> *I was seeing people and sometimes they were smiling to me, just give me a bit of, you know, a boost. Yes, from the smile I could tell people were friendly and warm, you know* (G3, female spouse).

However small the gesture, this sense of friendliness and warmth hinted at the possibility of establishing a closer connection with people who lived locally, as in the words of the participant below:

> *Here, the main thing we saw it here, the difference, that everybody in the street will smile and friendly with you. That's what it should be like, because if there is relation, it can be more than that* (B4, female spouse).

This "friendly recognition" can be the difference for families between feeling a sense of welcome and inclusion in a neighbourhood and a feeling that there is little potential for building neighbourly relations, or worse, that the neighbours are unwelcoming and antagonistic. One participant who lived in an area with no local playground for his kids to play in, and far from transport and local shops, described it as somewhere where "*there are not many places to go.*" He went on to add later that there was little potential to connect with his neighbours as they were a little conservative.

> *I feel like they are a little bit conservative so it's not easy to interact with them or make a kind of friendship or any kind of relationship with them* (B5, male sponsor).

Others described hostile encounters with their neighbours. In most cases this was conflict arising over the noise that children were said to be making in apartment blocks and this was particularly exacerbated by the effects of being in lockdown and spending more time indoors. The perceived pressure from neighbours to keep the children quiet was causing many families stress and highlighted the difference it made to have supportive and understanding neighbours compared to those who were antagonistic. In general, participants were very sensitive to their neighbours and tried to keep their children quiet when possible, with one parent of three small children commenting:

> *We need to care for the neighbour as well, so I have to say to the boy to be quiet, so not to make any trouble for the neighbour.* [later adding her hope was] *just for the kids to be more comfortable as well, so I don't need to tell them "Be quiet, be quiet" all the time so they do have their freedom and I feel better as well – not stressed all the time* (B15, female spouse).

Another participant contrasted the reaction of one older neighbour who was understanding, to another who complained about the noise, concluding:

> *I'm so sorry, we don't like to be annoying for any neighbour. We respect our neighbour and we are very sorry but our kids from war zone and so they don't have any friend here, so they must try to play* (G9, male sponsor).

After a series of hostile encounters with his neighbour over the noise his children were making, the sponsor who had described his neighbours as "a bit conservative" was reluctant to conclude that this particular neighbour's hostility might be racially motivated.

Lastly, one family who particularly disliked the area they lived in appeared to themselves be unconvinced of the potential to build relationships with local people based not only on their perception that people living around them were involved in anti-social behaviour, but also on the lack of a shared language and ethnicity. Both mother and daughter described a "rough area" with a drug problem and referred to the fact that most people were Pakistani or African. This participant reported that she had coloured in the segment of the wheel labelled, 'area I live in' a "smokey brown" colour for this reason.

This consolidates the idea that, in addition to foci and the absence of threat, the willingness of others to develop relationships are all fundamental protective factors in fostering a welcoming and 'including place' (Spicer 2008). It also speaks to the multi-directionality of relationships and the willingness on both sides to be open to making relationships with those perceived as different from ourselves (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019). The issue of commonality or in establishing deeper friendships with people locally is addressed more fully in the Friendships and Trust section: 6.5.

In a few instances at least, where participants had developed good relationships with their immediate neighbours or other people living locally, this had overcome their negative perception of the area or its reputation as a 'bad' area. Both of the interviewees below were sociable people and had also lived in the UK for a significant time (9.5 years and 3.5 years respectively).

> *Wow, they are great people. The area I live is not a good area, but this particular building where I live, they are so good.* [and later she explains] *it's only very credible because of the connection I have, that's why, because you need people, you can't live by yourself, you need somebody* (G10, female sponsor).

> *Before I heard […] this area was trouble, but you know was totally opposite. This is a very, very good area, very happy, it's very quiet and we have got a very good relationship with the neighbour (G7, male sponsor).*

Relationship to the City

Finally, those participants who had made an active choice to move to Birmingham or Glasgow (as opposed to having been housed there by the authorities), were particularly instructive about what makes a city desirable as a place to settle with your family. The reasons given were primarily that these two cities were considered to offer greater freedom and opportunity due to their size. They were also considered more ethnically diverse, friendly, accepting and to offer greater educational and employment opportunities than smaller cities in the UK. In some instances, people came to the city because they had family or friends already living there:

> *When I was in the small city,* [name] *no opportunity, I was suffering from the racism, you know? It's a very small village or a city. Unfortunately, there is not many educated people and even they didn't have any clue what is a refugee. So I don't know, we were just victim of racism. But here I chose Birmingham*

because it's a big city, multicultural, you know? Just it's like a culturally different people, so that's why I chose Birmingham (B15, male sponsor).

Birmingham is a big city. I have loved it from the beginning like when we came here and right now we have a lot of friends and we have a triangulation with friends in here. I have so many friends around and we see each other, and talk, so that makes a big difference for us (B6, male sponsor).

I always concerned about my family and the good quality of education for my children, so I decided to come to Glasgow and also because Glasgow is a big city. So, I decided to come to Glasgow (G8, male sponsor).

In this sense, whilst our findings very much underscore observations that integration happens at the level of neighbourhood and area (for example, Kearns & Whitley, 2015), it would seem that an interplay of diversity, reputation, and existing social connections are all factors influencing onwards migration to large urban areas, and so play an important role in families' decisions as to where they will ultimately settle.

At local area level, this section has highlighted the conditions that initially make an area feel welcoming or unwelcoming, 'including' or 'excluding' (Spicer 2008) and suggests that a combination of factors including proximity to amenities, feeling of security and friendliness of neighbours are paramount. The next section looks at the barriers and enablers in developing closer ties in a local area and to become part of a social network or community.

6.5 Friendship and Trust

Having looked at initial 'friendly' relationships made with neighbours in the local area, this section turns to analyse the pathways and circumstances that led families to develop deeper, more trusting friendships, who they made them with, and what kind of support they offer (or in social capital terms, the resources that flow from them). Beyond opportunity and conditions to build relationships, developing ties and local support networks is dynamic and takes time. The relationships that families made were specific not just to the area that they lived in, but also to their particular circumstances, priorities and the stage they were at on their own integration pathway. The findings suggest that ties with family and friends who were from a similar background (i.e. shared country of origin or shared language) or similar experience to ourselves (e.g.as an asylum seeker, refugee or immigrant) both provide a stable base (bonding capital) but also connect us to new people and networks, thus also providing bridging social capital. Furthermore, the definition of those who we consider similar to ourselves can change over time as our own identity evolves and adapts in line with our life experience or journey along the integration pathway. This section looks primarily at friendships between adults; section 6.3 titled Children and School, considers young people's social relationships.

Consolidating trusting ties

As discussed in the Family Bonds section: 6.2, for some families their priority was very much to consolidate the bonds between themselves and arguably, they were less concerned with forming strong ties outside their immediate family for the time

being. This resonates with the work of Horenzcyk (1997) who draws on Berry's (1997: 10) work around acculturation "choices" to highlight migrants' agency in choosing where to integrate:

> "Immigrants make clear distinctions between their various 'spheres of acculturation' [choosing] to which to assimilate more than others" (Horenczyk 1997:36)

We would add that the choices families made about where to integrate were very much pragmatic choices related to the stage they were at in their own integration journey as a recently reunited family unit. Family B15 were a case in point: after a year of separation and three young boys to look after, they were keen to be friendly but in no rush to form strong friendships outside of the family. Although they did not seem to have many friendships yet, they seemed confident that this would come in time and were getting to know their neighbours – one neighbour in particular – more in the meantime. They had been enjoying the time at home together during lockdown and the spouse (having arrived 9 months earlier with the children) saw it as an opportunity to practice her English with her husband, which was seen as a crucial step to participating more fully. Whilst the sponsor was clear that he was confident to introduce himself to the neighbours and to offer his help, his wife (who spoke less English) was also comfortable to be in the initial stages of making friendships with local people from Birmingham:

> *I know how to introduce myself … I give them hand if they need that all the time so they like that …* (B15, male sponsor).

> *So as you know there is a language barrier between me and the other family, but even though there is a language barrier I feel they are quite lovely and friendly. Sometime I try to talk, you know? I can see they don't understand me but still smiling or they're pretending they do understand me. But in general they are lovely…* (B15, female spouse).

Arguably, the fact that this family had a close and supportive bond between husband and wife, combined with the fact that they had not been in the country for very long, were both educated to degree level and were seemingly outgoing people meant they felt relatively assured and self-sufficient that they did not *need* to draw on friends for emotional or practical support. They were clear, however, that they did draw on Barnardo's for support and felt their keyworker was the linchpin to helping them get set up as a family in Birmingham. This is discussed more in the Navigating Systems section: 6.6.

Loneliness and isolation

A few of the more recently arrived families spoke of feeling lonely and isolated. These were mainly spouses and children who had not yet had the opportunity to enrol in school, language classes or in other activities or had only just started before the COVID-19 lockdown began in March 2020. In the case of Family B12 this was exacerbated not only by lockdown, but also a sense of being alone.

> *At least now sometimes we can go to the park (with the whole family). But I still haven't had enough time to meet people. I'm just alone at the moment*

(B12, female spouse).

Similarly, the eldest child of Family G10 had only arrived in Glasgow to join her mother and sisters just before lockdown started and had therefore had no time at all to start school or establish any friendships for herself:

> *She hasn't at all, at all, at all, so she has not gotten to know anybody, she has not gotten to know any school, nobody, no college, no activities, nothing, just inside. So that's why she couldn't say much* (G10, female child aged 13).

The wife in Family G7 said that she rated her level of fulfilment with home and family life at 80% before lockdown and only 20% since March, explaining:

> *Yes, so the 20% is [husband] because he is my only friend now* (G7, female spouse).

The other main barrier to establishing friendships was a lack of English. For those with low levels of English and who were not yet enrolled in English as a second language (ESOL) classes and this was felt as a huge barrier to socialising with people local to the area. In some cases, it even meant they were lacking in confidence to leave the house.

> *Yes, we don't have any kind of relationship, and I think maybe because of the language barrier, it's not easy to communicate with someone when you are not speaking good English, so even if you ask them, you cannot understand their answers* (G13, male sponsor).

A lack of English was cited as a barrier to all levels of friendship, from initiating friendships with people outside one's own community to developing deeper friendships or being more integrated in the local community. Those with higher levels of English language, by contrast, were concerned to improve their fluency not only in the language but also the local dialect/ accent and culture. The first of these quotes is from a family with very little English language (and likely very low levels of education) who were heavily dependent on friends and family from their home country to interpret for them. The second contrasting quote is from Family B15 who were highly educated, self-sufficient and where the sponsor had good spoken English.

> *[T]he lack of the language I have some problems to integrate. So that's why, so I need to live more closer with the community* (B14, male sponsor).

> *I need a high level of communication, not just speaking or – in every aspect. I'm not sure, maybe writing, like culture, I'm not sure, but in general maybe every aspect, not just for the verbal communication* (B15, male sponsor).

Participants were keen to get on and participate more fully in life, to develop relationships, study, volunteer and find work. We know that English language is both a means and a marker of integration (Ager and Strang 2008; Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019). Thus, we might say that close relationships with English speakers are both a means to developing command of the language and a marker of having command of the language. It is worth quoting Collyer et al. (2018: 50) in full here:

"Without significant English language ability, their daily contacts with their neighbours did not progress beyond polite nods and smiles. To go any further required better command of English, but they couldn't develop their English sufficiently without those closer relationships."

Or, in the words of the mother and spouse of Family G7:

Especially now I want to learn language, so just go back to English class, and just socialise more because I'm a very, very social person so just go and find friends and socialise (G7, female spouse).

Weak ties

Weaker ties fall into two categories: early stage relationships which have the potential to develop into closer ties, and what we refer to as 'superficial friendships' where it seemed participants had little inclination to develop a closer relationship. The latter tended to be with acquaintances from ESOL courses or other regular activities (such as going to the mosque or church), where the former tended to be people whom participants had met during the course of their daily activities, such as taking the children to school or the park.

A number of participants explicitly referred to superficial friendships as "not close" or not as "friends to rely on" but rather as people to say hello to and chat to. At most, they might consult these acquaintances for information, but the level of trust in them was low. These were not friends that people had generally kept in touch with during lockdown and their contact was limited to meeting during activities – in an ESOL class or the mosque, for example.

So, mostly just to you know to chat, and learn English, not very close friends to rely on for support (G3, male sponsor).

I just try to take some information, not a personal opinion because everybody has got their personal information, so just take some information but not rely on 100% (G7, male sponsor).

So I had the chance just to meet two or three ladies, they were lovely, we chat, but they were, kind of, not the same age range, they were very much older than me (G3, female spouse).

These relationships tended not to have progressed to become closer friendships, possibly because the participant did not want to developer a deeper connection in that context (perhaps due to a lack of commonality or connection made or a desire to bound the relationship) rather than due to a lack of time to develop into more meaningful relationships. For example, the sponsor from Family G10 said she just went to the Mosque to worship rather than to make friends, the female spouse from Family G3 didn't feel connected with the women she had met at church due to the age difference between them.

In contrast, early-stage relationships were with often those with neighbours and other parents who had children of a similar age (most of whom they had met through local parks and children's schools). There was the sense in many of these relationships

that the friendship between parents (particularly mothers) was developing through the regular contact of their children, but perhaps not yet cemented as a close friendship. Families G9 and B4 were two examples where the children were developing a strong friendship with their neighbours' children. In the case of Family B4, the parents both described their neighbour (from Birmingham) as nice and said of their children *"they make it like a friend now"* (B4, female spouse). Like the family below, the children were in and out of one another's houses for play dates:

> *They are living another building. They are from Libya so our – their kids speak Arabic and English and enjoy with our kids, especially for [daughter's name], because their daughter is the same age as [daughter's name], nine year old. So actually [daughter's name] every day love to go down and play with [friend's name] as she is named* (G9, female spouse).

Family B14 had met another family from their home country in the hostel they were previously housed in and had become friends with them over the course of the three months living together. They had maintained regular contact over the subsequent six months and described this as a strong friendship, hinting at the potential for such relationships made between parents with similar aged children (and, in this case a shared background) to evolve and embed over time (Ryan 2018).

> *Yeah, we've been there for three months together, so not only us, the parents, but even our kids they get to know each other and they make strong friendship. So we have continuous contact with them and then even they were visiting us to our temporary accommodation and we also went to their home. So yes, we do have a strong friendship with them* (B14, female spouse).

Pathways to Friendship
Friends, defined as people with whom families were consistently in contact with and in whom they had high levels of trust, were important to every family in our cohort barring those who, from our interviews with them, appeared to have little or no connections of any sort to draw upon. We explore here how and with whom these friendships were formed.

Two sponsors spoke of close friendships with people they had met through voluntary organisations which offer support to refugees and asylum seekers. The father and sponsor of Family B4 met an English couple through a support and advocacy organisation based where he was living at the time, in Lancaster. He was made homeless at the point of being recognised as a refugee (for details on destitution after a grant of refugee status see for example Strang et al. 2015, 2016); and the couple invited him to live with them temporarily, until he found another house:

> *I meet them – because she's working in organisation, it's called* [name of organisation] *I receive a letter because I get my resident [Leave to Remain], so I have to leave the home. So I don't have any place to go there, so they care about me, they let me stay at their home until I get another house, like that, yes* (B4, male sponsor).

Having offered the sponsor a place to stay, this British couple had continued to provide the family with practical support: to fill in forms and sometimes send books

for the children. Even though both the sponsor and the couple had since moved to different parts of the UK, they still kept in constant daily contact.

> *They write a lot of forms, he will ask them and we wish we can – you know since we came, we didn't meet them, because they are far away – [names of couple]. But we are always speaking with them – video call. Like even the kids, when they say, 'We are having friends here,' they will say, '[names of couple].' Always, they will remember them, she spoke with them by phone and she's having a small cat, they will speak with her by video. So they try to help – yeah, much more like if we get any tension or if we get in the form or sometime we don't know where should you go with the documents, like that. So we will fast – we will call emergency number – it's [wife of couple's name] number [laughing]* (B4, female spouse).

The friendship was such a key support to the whole family in fact, that the spouse says that they are their "emergency number". This, and the fact that the sponsor refers to the couple as "part of my family" indicate just how strong a bonding relationship this had become.   The mother and sponsor of Family G10 had similarly developed a close friendship with a woman she was matched with as a befriender through a third sector organisation whilst she was still in the process of applying for asylum, two years prior to the interview. Although her friend was originally a migrant herself, she said of her that "*she's lived here for like over 20 years, so she's from here*" (G10, female sponsor).

She described how, beyond taking the family out and attending organised "refugee activities" together, the support she most valued had been in helping her to furnish her accommodation. Drawing on her own social networks, her friend had found that one of her friend's was clearing out her late aunt's house and was keen to pass on lots of furniture and even appliances.

> *So the main thing that she did for me was, when I moved in here, when they gave us the basic thing – the house – they gave us, I could not afford so many things. I would have gotten a loan, but she just asked me is there anything she could do to help and I told her. She was going to give me the dining we are sitting on now, so she now told a friend of hers that I needed something, that she wanted to go for help. And her friend said, 'No, don't do that.' That her aunt has just passed away and that if we can come together, she will give us some things that I'm going to need, that I should come* (G10, female sponsor).

Again, this relationship points to the fluidity of bonding, bridging and linking capital that flows from a close friendship such as this one.   It is important to note too that in both of these examples where a close friendship had developed with people who were settled in the UK, the interviewees themselves spoke very good English meaning communication was not a barrier to establishing a friendship. Similarly, the fact that the 18-year-old son of Family G2 spoke English confidently, was very likely a contributing factor in his being confident to negotiate joining a local football team (see section 6.3: Children and School). Moreover, although Family B15 hadn't yet established close friendships in Birmingham, the sponsor's command of English may also have been a factor in his confidence that he would, be able to when he chose

to.

The mother and sponsor of Family G10 described another key friendship with a (co-national) Nigerian woman whom she had met by chance in the street when she arrived in the area and who had taken her under her wing. She described her relationships with both this woman and another local friend as having been the key to her feeling connected to the area where she was living. So much so, that even though she didn't consider it a good area, she wanted to return there after being rehoused in another part of Glasgow.

Other families who had developed strong friendships had, in the main, developed these with people from a shared country of origin or a shared language. The male sponsor from Family G8 told us about friend who had lived in the UK for seven years and whom he originally met through a mutual Sudanese friend when on a visit to Glasgow from his then home in Belfast. This friend was not only the catalyst for him moving to Glasgow, but also provided very practical support in helping him to get set up in the city.

> *I also got a great help from one of my friends who is Sudanese, and he was encouraging me to come to Glasgow at the beginning. So he helped me, driving me around in Glasgow for different appointments* (G8, male sponsor).

Family G9, from Palestine, was confident in speaking English. The father and sponsor had originally come to the country to study for a Master's degree. The mother, a qualified teacher, had found work in Glasgow teaching Arabic, through her close friend from Libya who lived near to them and had been in Glasgow for more than 10 years. It seemed the initial connection had been made by the mothers through a local community group run by African women, that was a few minutes' walk from their house. Through participating there in activities including English classes, knitting and cooking, the mother from Family G9 had also made friends with an American woman who worked at the organisation. Family G9's eldest child had since also become good friends with one of the Libyan family's daughters who was the same age as her, and they played together often.

Indeed, activities in community or sporting groups were cited by several participants as places where they had connected with a number of people over a shared interest or background, with examples given of music groups and craft activities. Crucially, two women told us of the close connections they had made from participating in projects that were women-only spaces. Friendship with people from a similar background to oneself was clearly supportive to many interviewees, and a number of participants relied on these contacts for practical and emotional support as well as information and advice, particularly from co-nationals who had been here for longer than themselves. These friendships were perhaps even more comforting for those who did not have extended family living in the UK such as Family B5.

> *I also get in touch with the old Sudanese guys who have been here for a long time, who also give us some advice* (B5, male sponsor).

Yes, she helps me very much and being from the same country and speaking the same language it's always comfortable for me to have someone like this (G13, female spouse).

Family G14 were particularly desperate to live closer to the centre and near to their community (fellow Eritreans). The reason for this was that they relied on their friends in the city centre to interpret for them when dealing with official paperwork written in English. Despite being otherwise happy with their accommodation and the local area, they described how they needed to be near to their community to facilitate their integration more widely, out with their own community.

It's not hard for me to integrate with anyone else, whoever it is, but because of the lack of the language I have some problems to integrate. So that's why, so I need to live more closer with the community (B14, male sponsor).

We understood then, that rather than being an indicator of unwillingness to mix with people outside of your own network, this initial bond with people from the same country provided a source of comfort, support and offered a stable stepping-stone from which to explore a wider geographic and social terrain.

When I first came in here I did not know anybody but now because I have lots of friends and I know people who were from Iran as well so it makes me be more comfortable in here and I got used to the places, like I know how to go out and know the places (B6, male sponsor).

The first thing, we have a strong community in Birmingham. The time I have been there, I met a good network and friendship, and I like the city (B5, male sponsor).

Yet not all participants felt comfortable around those with whom they had a shared background. The example below highlights that individual personality and personal preference also have a strong role to play in choosing friends for reuniting refugee families, as much as for anyone. The father and sponsor in Family G7 describes how he prefers the reserved nature of his Scottish friends compared to his relationships with fellow Iranians who he felt overstepped personal boundaries.

It's mostly about the limit, the people from our culture they don't know their limits, you know, sometimes I sit with my Scottish friends, we chat, we have fun, but just something as soon as we say, bye, everything finishes. But, in our culture unfortunately sometimes people are a bit nosey, what are you doing, what have you got, what are you going to do tomorrow, what you have, what you're going to cook, I don't enjoy this sort of relationship (G7, male sponsor).

Our findings suggest then that strong bonds of friendship – be it with people who share a language or national background, or with those from another culture or country - is a vital source of emotional and practical support to recently arrived families. In the migration context, friendship, and so the concept of social bonds, can and does move beyond commonly held assumptions of co-ethnicity as the main similarity that binds people together. It would appear that though that a choice of

who to connect to is more widely available when you share a common language. Other facilitating factors for developing friendships include access to community spaces, including women only spaces for at least two women in our sample; formal connections through organisations that offer befriending or hosting services; and activities based around a common interest such as football or music. Regardless of the exact pathway to friendship, its role as a connection that provides emotional comfort and practical guidance and support is confirmed.

6.6 Navigating Systems: Social Links

Szreter and Woolcock (2004: 655) define social links as "those that connect people across explicit vertical power differentials, particularly as it pertains to accessing public and private services." We suggest that as regards this type of linking connections, three strands emerge from our data. The first encompasses occasions where people directly approached statutory agencies, connected with workers there and, in some cases, challenged their decisions without relying upon the support of others do so. The second, and perhaps most prevalent strand, brings into the spotlight the role of a third sector worker – with whom most families felt a strong connection – acting as a broker between families and public services. Finally, we were told of situations where families seemed to accept systems limitations, occasionally to their own detriment. This story is perhaps the most complex of the three. It can be situated either as a story of powerlessness and lack of linking capital, or alternatively as a story of resilience and acceptance of temporary hurdles on the path to integration (Lenette et al. 2012). We explore each strand in turn below, with a focus on connections with the two public services that emerged most prominently in our work – namely the statutory homelessness and social housing allocation systems and education.

Direct links

The existence (and persistence) of structural barriers to making one's way through this maze of systems and processes have been well-documented in previous work (Strang et al. 2015, 2016; Refugee Council 2018; Marsden 2015). Families' experiences of the social housing and education systems, respectively, appeared however to be qualitatively different. A picture emerged from our interviews of the statutory housing system as being relatively inflexible and hard to navigate. Several people recounted being told that they had to accept offers of housing that in some cases were clearly unsuitable or unsustainable, and largely had not felt empowered to challenge this:

> **Interviewer**: *did you get a choice of taking this house or not, was this the first house that you saw or did you see other houses, you know, did you choose between houses before moving to this one?*
> **Sponsor:** *It was the first one I have been offered, and I had to accept it because they told me it is not going to be easy if I refuse this one to get another one. Although, it was just a normal accommodation and my wife has got some health issues, but we decided to get it instead of just waiting and miss this one and we don't know when we are going to get another one* (G13, male sponsor)

> *I've got no choice. If I have my way, I don't know, anywhere they give me because we can't dictate, we can't say. Like when I got this house, you can't say no to your house. Whatever they give you, you have to just take it like that, you know* (G10, female sponsor).

By contrast, where families were concerned or dissatisfied with the school allocation process, we were told of examples where people had taken matters into their own hands. Two families in Glasgow – G9 and G13 – told us that they had actively challenged, with some success, decisions taken to send their children to schools that were either too far from their homes or resulted in siblings being separated. At least two more families recounted actively pursuing their children's school registration through direct contact with schools, and in one case, registering them only after satisfied that the schools in question had been rated "*outstanding*" (B15, female spouse).   In the example below, it would seem that the mother's intervention proceeded in two parts: 1) approaching the school directly and being advised to apply online but again – for the second time – 2) pushing back against official advice and finally obtaining the assistance and the result that she had hoped for.

> *The case worker applied for the two children in the two schools, so the one accepted my son and the other one accepted my daughter. When I talked to the case worker she said, no, we can't change, but I decided to go myself to the school and talk to them and they accepted my daughter with my son […]*
>
> *I decided to just have a try, so I went to school and I talked to someone in the reception and they advised me to apply online. I told them it is not possible for me to do this so they decided to help me, they took the information and they filled the application form for me and they submitted it and I got this. I explained everything to them about my health issues and it's not easy for me to take two children to different schools, my husband is the only one who is capable of doing this. And, it is going to be difficult for him to do this and maybe sometimes he will miss the time for each, if he goes to bring the daughter he maybe late to the son. So, they accepted it, they put all the information and I got my daughter enrolled in the same school* (G13, female spouse).

Notably, the person who recounted this example of not only linking, but successfully leveraging connection with her children's school, was, in housing terms, living in unsuitable accommodation which, because of its location on the third floor of her building and her physical health needs, left her housebound. Similarly, whilst another family spoke at length about positive interactions with some statutory agencies, including JobCentre Plus, they were clear that as regarded negotiating for long term suitable housing, they were less confident that their voices would be heard within the system:

> *Actually, I'll be honestly with you, I don't think that if I request like that they will change for me. I don't think that, yeah, I don't think that they will listen to me* (B4, male sponsor).

Strong links and agency in one realm do not necessarily translate to another if systems and the people who enforce them are not receptive to connection, as Szreter and Woolcock (2004: 656) are at pains to remind us: "the initiating push

for linking social capital may well still come from the poor themselves… but a sympathetic and skilled response from those in power and authority will be critical too."

Third sector support – mediating links

Given that our cohort of research participants were all, at the time of interview, beneficiaries of the FRIS – a joint project delivered by British Red Cross and Barnardo's – it is perhaps unsurprising that, with regard to navigating systems such as housing and education, the social connections that emerged most prominently were families' connections with these third sector organisations. The role of the voluntary sector in the UK in filling gaps in statutory systems has already been documented (Mayblin and James, 2018). Certainly, with only two exceptions, it would appear that the support offered by these agencies constituted a vital connection that mediated families' contacts with agencies of the state. Although Family G2 expressed discontent with the perceived lack of effective support they had received from British Red Cross whilst Family B12 seemed to be isolated even from the support of specialist agencies, the remaining eleven families all spoke warmly of the support throughout the family reunion process and post arrival of family members that had been offered to them by both this organisation, and their project partner Barnardo's.

These connections with specialist charities had not only been central to successfully exercising their rights to family reunion – the precursor for family members' arrival in the UK. They had also enabled them to make progress across many of the Markers and Means integration domains identified in the Indicators of Integration Framework (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). This sense of assistance that extended across a long time period, encompassing several areas, is expressed by the Sudanese sponsor who told us:

> I got all the help and support from the British Red Cross, since even before my family arrived, because they helped me with the family reunion, they booked the tickets for them, and then after they arrived they helped me with the forms. They checked the forms I have done for the housing, and they made some corrections, and they also helped me to settle in the first hotel until I get this house. If I feel I need some help, or support or advice I just go straight to them (B5, male sponsor).

Other participants made clear that the manner in which support was provided was as important as the resources, both material and informational, that flowed from families' connections with these agencies:

> going to school and they care about sending us food, money or everything like we need. So I really appreciate their support (B6, male sponsor).

For some families, the level of care provided by workers within third sector organisations (see also Askins 2015) seemed to transform their relationship with third sector providers from formal, linking connections into relationships that they described as being far more akin to a bonded connection, involving high levels of interpersonal trust:

That's why when she told us about this research we didn't even ask, because we have all this trust being built with [Barnardo's project worker], and we are happy to help her by any means because he has been supporting us for a whilst (G13, male sponsor).

Indeed, two families spoke of workers from these two agencies as becoming more like family members than formal support providers, as in the quote below where an arriving spouse describes the assistance her family have received from Barnardo's:

Yeah, I'm happy for [Barnardo's project worker]. She's like a key, you know, for us, for every support – I mean, for any challenge we're facing, we are going to [Barnardo's project worker] To be honest with you, not like she's like a key worker or is a case worker. She was like a member of the family to us (B15, female spouse).

This had implications in terms of research ethics
and was something we were acutely aware of in designing our informed consent procedures (see section 4.4: Remote Interviews). It raises, too, the spectre of potential over-dependence on third sector services. Family B14, for example, described a worker from Barnardo's as being 'like parents', implying a relationship of dependency that, in this family's case, appeared to be borne out in further discussions that revealed they were relatively unconnected to other services and people in the city where they hoped to settle. This echoes Greene's (2019: 8) observations that reporting strong, kinship-like connections with service providers may in fact be "an indicator of …increased vulnerability."

Weak links – isolation or resilience?

Only two families in our cohort appeared to be without any strong linking connections either to specialist third sector or statutory services. Both were living in Birmingham, and whilst in one of these families' children were registered in school, in another neither their housing nor schooling seemed to be in place. Indeed, that family's housing was so poor that they appeared to be living in unsanitary conditions at the time of interview:

It's okay from the outside but not quite from the inside. It has rats. We didn't have hot water for months, and nobody could come and fix anything because of lockdown (B12, female spouse).

For this same family, their experience of trying to register their daughters in school provides a counterpoint to the examples of independently formed linking connections above. Despite trying to build and leverage linking connections with three different institutions – the school, the Council and the British Red Cross – the interviewee places language as having proven an insurmountable barrier that resulted in her daughters missing a full year of education:

Registering the kids at school has been really difficult. We have had lots of problems with the school, it hasn't been easy at all [...] We tried to speak to the Council about this but they said to follow up with the schools about each daughter individually. As there is a language barrier there, we weren't able

to follow this up properly with the school. Both of my daughters have because of this missed out on a year of school.

The British Red Cross was helpful in that they searched for schools we could try to register the kids in, but we had to do all the registration and conversations with the school ourselves. Some schools have told us they're full, others have told us there are other problems and the language barrier has not helped things
(B12, female spouse).

This example speaks to a lack of access to services whereby the family were unable to exercise even their basic rights to decent housing and education, underscoring the importance of connection to integration more generally. However, it is important to note that this family's experience was not typical of the people interviewed during this project. What was perhaps more prominent was that whilst not all families felt confident in their ability to build and leverage linking connections with statutory services, this was not necessarily linked to a lack of independent agency, but to a pragmatic acceptance of difficulties inherent in the system, in some instances as explained to them by authoritative others:

I already told my housing officer about the overcrowding and he told me that they are going to look for a bigger house for me because we need five bedrooms. But they keep telling me, 'We don't have any available house with this number of rooms.' And from the beginning, they told me, "You are going to stay for a whilst in this house or in this flat, because we don't have many places with five bedrooms (G8, male sponsor).

In this acceptance of system limitations, which are widespread and well-documented within UK social housing system, it is possible to read a level of resilience in the fact of temporary obstacles, echoing Lenette et al.'s (2012: 648) description of resilience as a process of "finding productive paths through a maze of ups and downs."

Sponsor: For temporary is it not bad, we need like a bigger home, we need one more bedroom, at the moment my daughter and my son are sharing the same bedroom. But, in general, as a temporary it is good.
Interviewer: So, do you have what you need in the house for now?
Sponsor: So, not everything but, I don't know, we've kind of you know gone with it (G3, male sponsor).

Families then do not always lack linking connections and may actively seek to understand and navigate systems even if resigned to not always being successful in doing so. However, connections alone cannot always overcome the structural confines of statutory systems and their impact on refugee integration (for example, Strang et al. 2017).

6.7 Reciprocity and Giving Back
Coleman (1988) situates obligations and expectations as one of the forms of social capital that emerge when people are connected through social relations. In more basic terms, where networks have high levels of trust, people who are connected to one another, and who do favours for others in their network, can eventually 'cash in'

these favours for reciprocal help. Whilst Coleman (1988) focuses on the collective economic and social functionality of the capital generated through the web of obligation/expectation, in the migration context where newly arrived migrants may not have many resources to share or impart, their capacity to give help rather than be passive recipients of assistance may be critical to their self-esteem and wellbeing. Where they are locked only into relationships of dependency, this may be "detrimental to mental health and wellbeing because it undermines self-efficacy and deprives the individual of the benefits of altruism" (Quinn, 2014 quoted in Strang and Quinn, 2019: 19).

Thus, in this section, we focus on what our interviewees told us about times when they gave or planned to give help or repay assistance offered to them. To do so, we use the typologies of reciprocity developed by Phillimore et al. through their work with migrants living in the UK (Phillimore, Humphris and Khan 2017). Their work draws upon Hobfoll (2007) to elaborate on five interconnected forms of reciprocity: norm-based reciprocity, informal reciprocity, under-reciprocity, over-reciprocity and no reciprocity. We explore what our data tell us about each of these in turn below.

Norm-based reciprocity

Phillimore et al. (2017: 6) define this type of reciprocity as "repeated and more or less balanced resource exchange between known others." As they underline, this type of reciprocity is inherent in close relationships such as friendship (see section 6.4: Place) and family (see section 6.1: Approach to Analysis). Beyond our observations as to the importance of this type of bonded relationship to emotional wellbeing, this study generated relatively few concrete examples of norm-based reciprocity outside the immediate family. This may be an artifact of the fact that recently reunited families will, as we note in the Social Connections and Integration 'Journey' section: 7.1, in most cases, focus on re-building relationship within the family circle. Nonetheless, two sponsors, both of whom had been in the UK for relatively long periods compared to others in our interview sample, spoke of help they had provided to friends. In both examples, this support involved assistance with childcare or parenting, chiming with our findings above about children's role as generators of social connectedness and capital:

> *We have a family friend whose wife gave birth recently so my wife used to cook for her because of the baby, and I take the food to them like every few days. So this is a way we were supporting a family friend* (G8, male sponsor).

> *Whenever she's stuck with her childcare, I look after her children […] I just ask her, 'Don't worry, if you need anything, just count on me as well'* (G10, female sponsor).

The second interviewee quoted above, a woman who was a confident English speaker and had been in the UK for 9.5 years – the longest period in our cohort – provided too some nuance to the positive view of norm-based reciprocity. Whilst she spoke at length of help she had had from others, and of help she was able to offer to those newer to the country, it was clear that the bonds of expectation and obligation worked not only to generate opportunity for her, but at times to constrain her.

Although this interviewee was hoping to move to a new area, she felt obligated to remain where she was as another woman, a recently recognised refugee, was moving there to be with her:

> *You know, I was thinking of moving elsewhere before. Well, there's this friend as well that's looking up onto me as well […] she wanted to come because we are the only ones that she knows here […] So each time I told her that am I moving, she was like, 'Oh, but we're coming back because of you,' so I don't really want to betray her […] That's why I talk with my housing association, that if they get me a house, well it would be probably because of her we can, we can stay* (G10, female sponsor).

The converse, more positive potentiality of reciprocity emerged when one spouse spoke of having invited an employee from the local council to eat at her home. In this example, engaging in reciprocity through providing hospitality emerged as a way to redress power imbalances within relationships:

> *From the Council, the one she call from the council one month before like that. I was telling her, 'you have to come and taste our Sudanese food'. At least, yeah, at least and they think that you're inferior, like when you're a new family ... taste their food, know their traditions. At least you will see some change* (B4, female spouse).

This speaks to the potential for norm-based reciprocity to enable new migrants to re-assert their agency and "re-gain self-esteem" (Phillimore et al. 2017: 9), establishing themselves not as recipients of help but providers of material and cultural resources.

Informal reciprocity

The next type of reciprocity identified by Phillimore et al. (2017: 9) is informal reciprocity, namely the "exchange of resources given freely by individuals to other individuals, particularly strangers." Only one of our interviewees spoke at any length of her commitment to making what Philimore et al. (2017:9) describe as "sacrifice for complete strangers". The person in question gave us multiple examples of her attempts to connect with and provide succour to those around her. She spoke of chatting to older women when she passed them in the street as she recognised that they "*feel lonely… they want anyone to talk with them*." She described hoping to return to her local JobCentre to update them on her progress as when she had first arrived, they had done their jobs with care and love, making her feel happy. Importantly, she very much expressed the sense of a circularity of giving, that providing something to one person one day would be returned to you as a sense of wellbeing and happiness:

> *When you give support to others, it will support you, I feel like that. Whatever you are giving, it will come back, whatever good you are giving, it will come back to you […] So whatever you are giving, like if it is like a small thing, one day you will feel like you change in another person, and that feeling of happiness, like I like that feeling* (B4, female spouse).

Whilst it would seem, therefore, that this example aside, levels of informal reciprocity amongst our interviewee participants were fairly low, our interviews took place during

the COVID-19 pandemic, which reduced people's contact with strangers and so limited their opportunities to "invest in some kind of universal pot" of kindness and good acts (Phillimore et al 2017: 223).

We have collapsed the next two categories of reciprocity as we understand both to refer primarily to situations where people were not able or chose not to reciprocate help given. Within our data, the boundaries between the two concepts were at best unclear. At the time of our interviews, it appeared that most interviewees were recipients rather than providers of help or support. Two families appeared to be isolated from any connections that could have offered opportunities for reciprocity (Family B2, Family B12), whilst one other family spoke at length about their reliance on a friend from their country for almost everything due to their own lack of confidence in the English language (Family B14). Rather than strategies of resource conservation, for these three families in particular this lack of reciprocity spoke to a general lack of connectedness.

One family did disclose to us that they were locked into a cycle of dependency with another person within their network, described by them as being a friend. This is perhaps the most vivid example in our data of the under-reciprocity posited by Phillimore et al. (2017). It illustrates that support provided from within social networks can carry negative as well as positive consequences where, as was the case here, one's material circumstances preclude ever managing to repay a debt:

> *No, we didn't get any kind of support, we even didn't tell anyone that we are having difficulties, it's not easy just to tell someone and ask for support, nobody knows about our financial difficulties. […] My husband applied to borrow some money from his friend to cover our expenses, so every time we get the Universal Credit we have to cover the money we borrowed before, it is like a cycle going on* (G13, female spouse).

Compounding the situation for this family was their sense of shame at the situation, which prevented them from seeking assistance outside this relationship of financial dependency. One of our workshop participants emphasised, though, that overcoming a situation of dependency was possible. Having initially been homeless

have eventually resulted in a reciprocal relationship. For example, one previous host had given her a lift to the airport to collect her arriving family. Time was the principal facilitator of this shift from under-reciprocation to a more equal relationship.

Phillimore et al. (2017: 12) suggest a category of reciprocity they name as 'over-reciprocation', whereby people "actively sought opportunities to help others because offering help was an important aspect of their cultural or religious identity which gave

them a sense of purpose." This is conceived as being a form of reciprocity that does not carry the expectation of a concrete exchange from the other person or organisation. There was only one example within our interview cohort of someone actively contributing material resources to a cultural or religious project:

> *But in the coming future, I am thinking of joining the Sudanese Community in Glasgow and paying my membership fees to be a legal member … I also have been touch with them because they were planning to buy a place to use it as a mosque, and a place where families can meet and some activities for the children. So I have been in touch and I contributed some money to that project* (G8, male sponsor).

Instead, the most prominent type of reciprocity that emerged was a desire to 'give back' to society, represented both by a stated desire to volunteer within formal organisations, and more generally, to a broader desire to be good citizens who could contribute to society and the UK state. As such, our findings extend beyond the concept of over-reciprocation developed by Phillimore et al. (2017) and highlight more diffuse and general forms of belonging and citizenship.

Volunteering – a form of reciprocity?

Volunteering is most usually framed as one element along a pathway towards employability for those who wish to enter or progress in the labour market (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019). This certainly was the case for the two people in our cohort who were engaged in volunteering prior to COVID-19 lockdown. For them, their volunteer work appeared to be linked to their desire to be sociable and use their existing skills (like father and spouse, G7) or to keep busy and build career prospects (as explained by female sponsor, G10). However, three male sponsors, all from Sudan, explicitly framed their intention to volunteer in the future as a way of reciprocating, assistance they had received from the British Red Cross:

> *I will apply again for volunteering, especially in the Red Cross because they are helping people. I try also to help as I can. What they give it to me, I have to give it to other people also because they spend most of their time to care about me. I hope that I can also care about people* (B4, male sponsor).

> *Sponsor: I'm now thinking of, after I improve my English, I will volunteer with the British Red Cross for two years to pay back.*
> *Interviewer: So, you would like to be able to offer them your help in the future?*
> *Sponsor: Yes. I'm so happy and excited to pay them back or to help them or to give them support as they supported me, even if I clean the office for them* (G13, male sponsor).

Of note is the fact that they, and one other sponsor in our interview cohort, were to all intents and purposes unable to realise their wish to offer their time as volunteers due to practical barriers and competing priorities, for example learning English, obtaining a driving licence, and in one case the restrictions imposed by the COVID-

19 lockdown.   One man told us that demand for volunteer spaces was so high he had not been successful initially so was pursuing other options:

> *I tried to get involved in some voluntary work. I applied for the British Red Cross. The competition was very high. 28 people applied and they had only three vacancies. I talked to [Barnardo's Caseworker], if she could get me any voluntary work, so I can improve my English and pay back to the community* (B5, male sponsor).

Once more, we are reminded of some of the ambiguities in the third sector service provider - service beneficiary relationship, and of the inherent power imbalance in this connection, notwithstanding the resources that flow through it, as well as some of the hurdles, including second language acquisition, that refugees have to negotiate to participate in society through (voluntary) work (Cheung and Phillimore 2014; Bloch 2008; Ives 2007).

Contributing to society

Our final reflections upon reciprocity rely on the accounts of three family members in our sample, all of whom were interviewed in English and two of whom had been living in the UK for more than three years when we spoke to them. These three respondents used concepts of giving or paying back help offered to them by means of contributing not to specific known or unknown others, but to the country itself, in recognition of the fact that, as one sponsor said, *"the Government here are really helping everyone"* (B6, sponsor). Their comments chime with the words of refugees from previous integration studies in the UK who were keen to emphasise their ability and plans to be active members of society (Strang et al. 2017).

Contributing to society in this way ranged from the woman who spoke of the importance of making sure she and her family paid their taxes in time (Family B4), to the single mother who, once she had settled her three daughters in school, then found work, hoped to "give back" to the community (Family G10). Our proposed concept of societal reciprocity is perhaps expressed in most detail by Sponsor G9, from Palestine:

> *I always remind [my wife] and the kids, this country give us a lot. So I try every time to tell them we are like as guests here and they give us everything so we will try to be polite with all people here.*

> *We try to provide help in any field for this country because we will not forget they save us in the time maybe our country, my home country, not give me the safe, yeah. So that I'm hoping. So sometimes I hope my kids do better in the school and they can in the future help this country and like to repay all this help to this country* (G9, male sponsor).

Time, though, is crucial. As we noted at the outset of our findings chapter, being able to contribute emerged as very much contingent on having the time to get practical and emotional issues in one's own life sorted out, and then begin able to move on to make the contribution to society that refugees in this study, as in so many others, seek to achieve. Ultimately this takes us back to the resilience and

independent agency of refugees, and to the very real potential to harness this to the benefit of communities and states.

> *We hope that, we will try. I know we have a lot of issues. We faced a lot of problems but we were living in difficult, in the most difficult area so we learned how can we fight for our life, and we hope we can do better in the future* (G9, male sponsor).

6.8 Reunited Families in Lockdown

The unanticipated onset of lockdown measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic ruptured people's everyday routines, rhythms and mobilities. Social distancing reduced face-to-face and in-person interactions, and people were advised to spend no longer than an hour outdoors for daily exercise. This presented recently reunited refugee families, whose integration journeys most closely draw upon social connections and connectedness, with a unique set of challenges. Outside of a lockdown context, Strang and Quinn (2019) have illustrated a discrepancy between the forms of social support available to refugees on one hand, and the extent to which refugees are aware of and comfortable to draw upon this support on the other. The authors argue that trust facilitates the development of refugee social connections and warn of extreme social isolation as well as poor access to services in the absence of trust. Such vulnerabilities are only exacerbated when in-person interactions become at a premium. As the father and sponsor of Family G3 put it: *"[When] my family arrived we [felt] better, more secure … my daughter started school … [but] after lockdown, you know, everything vanished."* Refugee families' increased risk of isolation, however, was laid bare in when we asked his partner who she went to for emotional or practical support: *"Just my husband."* In this section, then, we reflect on refugee families' accounts of how they navigated the exceptional circumstances in which they chart their integration journeys.

Initially, the opportunity to make up for lost time among family units was welcomed by refugees. Sponsors' individual integration journeys were anyway geared towards the moment of family reunion. The husband from Family B4's account was illustrative:

> *Actually, Covid, for me, because we stayed here, we spent more time together here… it's very good for me … what's good is that we spend more time together as family* (B4, male sponsor).

His partner agreed:

> *When we came, we just wanted to… they [the kids] just wanted to see their father, so we didn't care that we are all – me and him and all of us – six people in one room, we didn't feel that bad. So, when they were saying 'there should be a separate room for the kids and a separate one for the parents', I said 'we don't feel that because we were away from him for too long', so at last we are together* (B4, female spouse).

The single-mother and sponsor of Family G10, also echoed the unanticipated benefits of being in lockdown: *"Nothing changed. It's just me and my family, we've got each other, we're OK."* In fact, lockdown was an opportunity for her children,

some of whom were previously separated from each other, to rekindle sibling ties. The 18 year-old son of Family G2 (a single-parent family of three) also described how lockdown would pass and that what was important was that the family was now together. He enjoyed this time as his mother was usually out working, and so lockdown offered a chance for them to spend more time together as a family.

Caring for children

As with most families, refugee or other, however, after a while the children got bored. Several families, living in temporary accommodation, told us of the difficulties of negotiating spatial issues around keeping children active but also quiet, linked to the type of home they had been allocated. The father of Family G9 explained that being locked down in a high-rise *"is not perfect for kids … we suffered a lot because [names of children] would play in the home and make noise, so our neighbour came to our flat one day"* (G9, male sponsor). The potential for tensions to be exacerbated in certain buildings or neighbourhoods due to children being confined in flats emerges too in the Friendships and Trust section: 6.5**.** On a more positive note, families who moved just before or during lockdown from hotel style accommodation into homes that were larger, and in some cases, equipped with outdoor space, were glad of the new freedoms this offered them and their children: "*Our neighbour, they have kids near the age of my kids. So … they used to play [downstairs] together"* (B4, female spouse).

Accounts of how to entertain children were reflective of the progress families had made in their integration journeys more broadly. Those who had by now established relatively stable routines and everyday relationships felt the rupture of lockdown more keenly than those still making their way. After a certain amount of time locked down with their families, at least two older children had turned to gaming with their friends in search of some space and privacy from parents, and a way to connect with friends. Those who had made friendships and established busy routines found it more difficult to cope with not being able to proceed with everyday life as they knew it. Because he couldn't *"meet people during lockdown",* the elder son of Family G2 ended up watching more movies and playing video games when he was not taking his brother for a kick-about in a nearby park: this was how he coped (and he could not wait for football practice to restart). For the only child of Family G7, by contrast, the friendships he was beginning to establish were not yet strong enough to last through lockdown, and so their absence was more keenly felt. His parents worried about the impact of lockdown on the development of these important relationships. He, too, turned to video games, but according to his mother: "*unfortunately just with his [previous country] friends, none of the local people"* (G7, female spouse).

The sudden shift in sociality that came with lockdown was in this way more difficult for more integrated families to adapt to. His father admitted: "*We don't see him much, sometimes he just comes for dinner or lunch and then back to his room"* (G7 male sponsor). His mother's elaboration further illustrated lockdown's evolving challenges:

> *Actually, it's a bit boring you know, because before we had good relationships – he was with us all the time, but now most of the time he is in his room on computer games, so we don't see him much* (G7, female spouse).

Some families had been reunited so recently that they had not had the chance to settle into pre-lockdown life, though. As the mother from Family B5 put it,

> *The time I arrived it was [almost already] lockdown, so [we] didn't have much to do apart from just going for a walk with the kids … around the house* (B5, female spouse).

Lockdown was the only form of everyday life some had experienced in the UK, then, rather than a drastic departure from it. But since they had less social connections to draw upon, the disruptions lockdown imposed in terms of being able to interact face-to-face were keenly felt, particularly for those negotiating language barriers, like the sponsor from Family B6. He referenced the particular difficulty in trying to communicate through the phone: "*It's not like seeing the person face-to-face and letting [them] understanding what you really want*" (B6, male sponsor). He had been in English language classes for three months prior to lockdown, and his spouse for just one month. Alongside tending for their two children, then, they kept abreast of latest public health guidelines through social media. Having more time on their hands allowed especially the spouse to focus on learning English. She had found refugee-to-refugee English language tuition on social media, an emerging and increasingly common phenomenon (see, for instance, AbuJarour and Krasnova 2017; Alencar 2018). The newly-arrived spouse in Family G9, meanwhile, was now a certified intermediate level English speaker, having successfully completed an online ESOL class.

More broadly, we noted a clear contrast between the accounts of families who had the appropriate means to connect to the internet. This echoes a Scottish Refugee Council report around the impact of lockdown on refugees, where it is argued that "a lack of access to suitable devices" was a "significant problem for refugees during lockdown" (Christie and Baillot 2020: 13). The difference was clear, for instance, between the resources that the female sponsor from Family G10 could draw upon and those that the female spouse from G13 could not. Tablets provided to the former from school and a local church allowed for more orderly management of everyday life in lockdown: whilst the school tablet was used to keep up with schoolwork, the other one was crucial for *"this Joe thing that we do online"* (G10, female sponsor) - very useful for *"tiring them out."* The mother from Family G13 had also received a link from her children's school, but could do little more than merely log in and back out from her husband's phone – the only device through which the family as a whole could connect to the internet.

7. Discussion

In this section we use the findings outlined in chapter six to outline two complementary frames through which to deepen our understandings of integration. The first uses the terminology of the 'journey' to suggest that the process of integrating in UK society is a gradually deepening and dynamic process, mediated by a feeling of trust and attachment to the people and places around you. The second focuses on the everyday nature of the work of integration, seeking to re-position refugee families not as exceptionally traumatised newcomers but as people who wish to exert their agency to contribute to society. We conclude with insights that speak to ongoing debates around the fluidity inherent in the concept of social connections. These three strands speak broadly to our proposed visual representation of integration through social connections, with each section in this chapter illustrating one element of the Connections Continuum shown at figure thirteen.

Figure thirteen: The Connections Continuum – the role of connections in integration
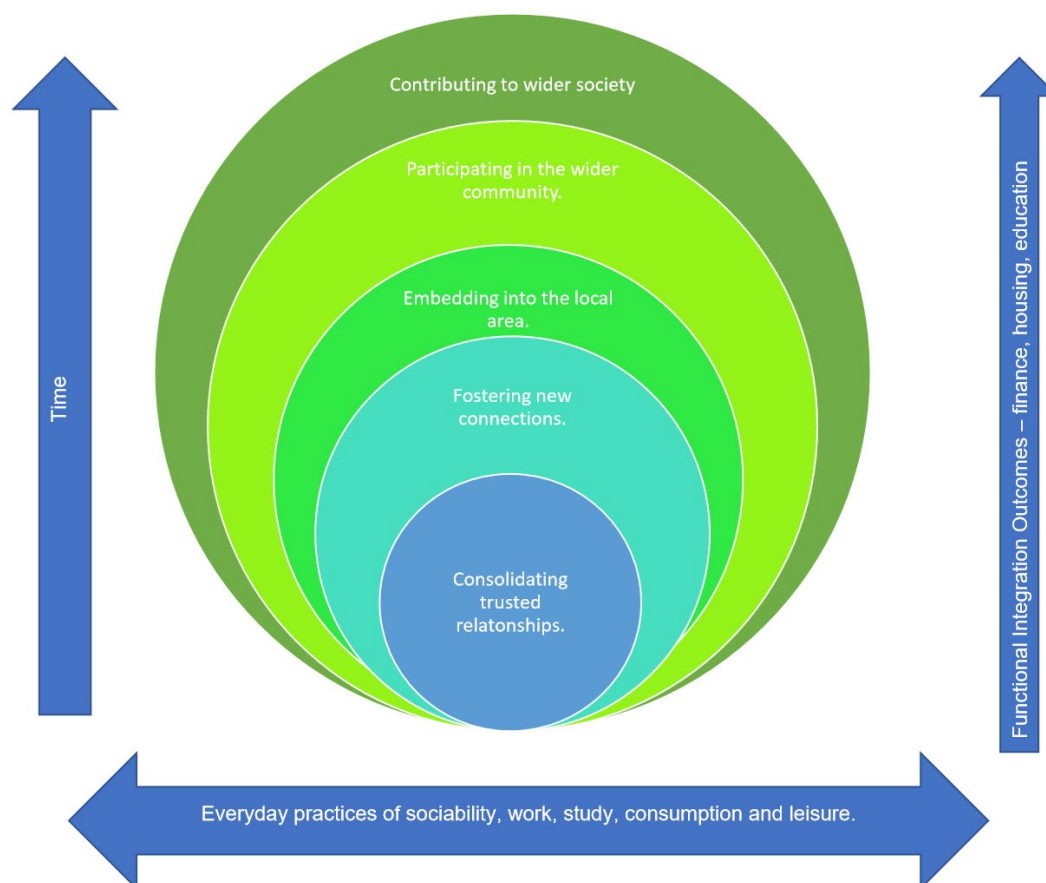
Throughout, we recognise that the integration journey is deeply personal and contextual. Whilst all families shared a common experience as recently reunited refugee families, the specificities of their family situations and backgrounds were different and thus, so were their needs. In the same way, families' social

connections reflect both the characteristics and available resources of their local areas, as well as their own evolving needs, over time, as an integrating family unit.

7.1 Social Connections and the Integration 'Journey'

From our data, we argue there are key functional stages in the integration process that were commonly identified by the families we spoke to, all of which are mediated by the absence or presence of trusting relationships with others. These stages emerged as essential 'building blocks' or stable foundations from which individuals and families could 'do' the everyday and complex process of 'integration'. The stages we propose are not mutually exclusive and movement along the integration pathway is not linear, as represented by figure five. Instead, this process can be disrupted, halted or accelerated by the presence or absence of trusting relationships and life events along the way.   As shown below, our data has enabled us to identify five key stages in the process of integration:

6. **Consolidating trusting relationships and re-establishing a sense of safety and security in the home** mediated primarily through relationships with service providers who could facilitate access to basic needs and through longer established friends and family.

7. **Fostering new connections** with other children and parents by settling the children in suitable schools, ideally within walking distance, offering the opportunity for both children and their parents to make formal and informal connections.

8. **Embedding into the local area** by establishing a connection with people in the immediate neighbourhood. This is mediated through the presence or absence of a feeling of safety and inclusion/welcome in the area and the opportunities to meet others in local shops, parks etc. and make informal connections.

9. **Participating in the 'wider community'** through accessing formal community groups and clubs (e.g. football groups, women's groups) that speak to people's skills, interests and aspirations to participate and give back. These are mediated by trusting relationships with people outside of our immediate circle

10. **Contributing to wider UK society** by 'giving back', an aspiration which can be realised through a multiplexity of bonding, bridging and linking relationships, built up over time.

Consolidating

The initial stage for reuniting families was to establish a sense of safety and security in their immediate home, as a family unit. This resonates strongly with the 'facilitator' domains of safety and stability in the Indicators of Integration Framework (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019). The findings from this study go further in highlighting the complex interplay between everyday functional factors (or means and markers) and relational factors (social connections) in achieving a sense of safety and security at home. For the families we spoke to the immediate priority once the family had been physically

reunited was to focus on the family's wellbeing. In practical terms, this meant securing appropriate housing and accessing financial support through work or benefits to meet the family's basic needs. For these functional aspects, most families were reliant on the support of service providers in facilitating access to and navigating the benefits and statutory housing system. The latter emerged as particularly hard to navigate, relatively inflexible and very limited in choice.

The other central relationships in this early stage of the family being reunited, was with the sponsor and/or friends or family who had been in the country longer than themselves. For all families, the sponsor played a key role in supporting the family to establish themselves in Birmingham or Glasgow with greater or lesser support from other family, friends or service providers. Beyond the functional basic needs, feeling safe and secure in the home was about reconnecting as a family, after years spent apart in some cases. This meant spending time getting to know one another, building and consolidating relationships between spouses and/ or between parents and children.

The extent to which recently arrived female spouses could draw on their husbands for support and for access to existing social connections depended on multiple factors. These included how cohesive the family unit appeared to be, for example, as regarded levels of trust between spouses, ease of adapting to being reunited and sharing responsibility for looking after the wellbeing of the family; and how integrated the husband was at the time of his family's arrival, in terms of his connections to other people and to the city where they were living. For all families, the pace at which they were able to establish a sense of safety in the home also depended on the parents' understanding of the housing and school systems, the level of English spoken by the parents; and the extent to which they could seek support and advice from family and friends who had been in the country longer than them.

Family B14, for example, were not confident in speaking English, had possibly low levels of education and relied heavily on friends and family from their home country who had been living in the UK longer than them. However, they were clear that this was a temporary stage for them, and they wanted to learn English and get "any job" as soon as possible. Thus, due to their more precarious situation, the speed at which they moved through this initial stage of settlement was likely to take longer than other families who had higher levels of education and command of English.

Conversely, those who also knew their rights and responsibilities and/or who had networks of more established friends offering them advice and support, were perhaps able to transition through this stage at a faster pace. For the one family who appeared less cohesive *and* who had low levels of trust in their service providers, they were not yet able to achieve a sense of safety and security. Arguably the absence of this halted their journey along their integration pathway.

New connections

Getting their children into a suitable school, ideally within walking distance of where they lived, was a priority for all parents. The functional aspect of access to schools was again primarily mediated by service providers and, in the case of one or two families, also advice from local friends. Again, although some families did exercise agency in selecting schools rated 'outstanding' or challenging local authority

decisions, there were real structural barriers for some families to securing school places, particularly in Birmingham where many children were still waiting for places. The limitations on exercising choice as to where they were housed and the fact that most families were in temporary accommodation also limited the opportunity for choice in where to send their children to school. This highlights the interdependence between each of these functional stages in enabling or inhibiting families to progress along an integration pathway.

School itself was a pivotal site for making connections and, once the children were in school, acted as an accelerator for integration for both children and parents. For children it offered their own space, outside of the home, from which they could begin to develop friendships and other social connections independently from their parents. For parents, taking the children to and from school offered an opportunity to meet people outside their immediate families and social circles either in the street en route to school, or in the playground. In a relatively short period, the children we spoke to who were in school had already managed to make friends with other children, some of whom supported them to learn the language and develop a greater sense of familiarity and belonging. For those who had not yet started school, there was conversely a strong sense of frustration from both parents and children of being stuck; unable to progress their integration journeys.

Embedding into the local area

Our findings suggest that the most important conditions perceived to make an area conducive to develop positive social connections were a feeling of safety and comfort, and being close to amenities (schools, shops, parks, community activities). However, these are mitigated by structural factors such as where you are housed, which may limit the opportunities for interaction; for example, because of a lack of diversity of people, places to meet or willingness to interact on either side.

The depth of attachment to the local area was equally mediated by the people who lived there; again illustrating the co-dependence of functional and relational aspects of integration into a local area. Beyond feeling physically safe, it was also important that people felt a sense of welcome and acceptance from others – a friendly smile in the street, or exchange of pleasantries with a neighbour or in the local supermarket sometimes provided enough of a foundation to develop deeper connections with local people and places.

Depending on how long they had lived in an area, our findings suggest that these initial friendly encounters have the potential to develop into much deeper connections over time, and to offer supportive networks. The mother and sponsor of Family G10 had made two of her closest friends in the neighbourhood, despite it being perceived as *'not a good area'*. Shops emerged as productive spaces for meeting others and as a destination in themselves for sociable outings, particularly during lockdown. There was also evidence that the resulting connections could in turn enable progression along functional paths of integration. This was demonstrated in two cases where individuals had made a connection with halal shopkeepers, resulting in paid work for one workshop participant and for one of the interviewees, in selling her Sudanese bakery products through local shops.

Participating more widely

Our findings indicate that it is critical to avoid assumptions about who people choose to identify with and develop friendships with; there is pragmatism, choice and agency in creating bonds, bridges and links. The people and groups our participants chose to affiliate themselves with was influenced by what stage of their integration journey they were at, and indeed who they identified with at different life stages. Key friendships were those where there was initially a sense of something shared or common that, over time had developed into a stronger trusting bond, to the extent that people could rely on those friends for support. Rather than being defined by their background, these were people who had consistently "*been there*." Examples of this abound in our findings. Family B14 had limited English and education, and so at the time of interview told us that they felt safest supported by a community of family and friends from their country of origin, whilst recognising that they are not *yet* ready to deepen and widen relationships outside of their own community. Family G10, a single mother who was a confident English speaker, relied on a diverse network of supportive women for emotional and practical support, and was able to return much of that support to others having been in the UK for an extended time. Meanwhile, Family G7 were keen to extend their network of Scottish friends, made through a variety of community projects that utilise their creative and intellectual skills, whilst actively limiting their interactions with others from their co-national community.

Opportunities to develop strong connections to people outside of one immediate social circle were both mediated by having the opportunity to access these groups (because they were local to you or spoke to your identity as a woman, mother, footballer or musician) and mediated these opportunities (e.g. by being directed to them by other trusted connections either from other organisations/agencies or through existing friends).

Contributing to society

Time emerged as a strong factor in being able to realise the aspiration of 'giving back' to wider British society. Whilst there were examples in our sample of 'norm-based reciprocity' where individuals exchanged practical and emotional support with friends who were in a similar situation to themselves, most of the families we interviewed were still more reliant on support than others than they were able to give help. Whilst some interviewees had already been able to offer their time as volunteers, others aspired to do so as a way of paying back the support they had received. However, whilst some also expressed a strong desire to contribute more widely to society and the country itself, there was a pragmatic recognition that most were not yet in a position to do so as they were still in the process of establishing a safe and secure base for their families in order to progress along the integration pathway. Moreover, whilst families were moving along this pathway at different rates given their own circumstances and contexts, COVID-19 and the resultant rupture to life, had applied a brake for all families in most, if not all areas of their lives.

This illustrates once again the co-dependency between moving through functional stages of the integration process, such as securing stable accommodation, schools and work; and the opportunities to develop the relational and temporal aspects of integration. In other words, families needed time to consolidate bonds with family and friends, and to build relationships through these very means and markers of

integration (housing, schools and work/ volunteering) before they could realise their *"hope to do better in the future"* (G9, male sponsor).

7.2 Everyday Connections

There has been a tendency is to analyse refugee experiences in terms of the exceptionalism of their past experiences of persecution and often precarious journeys to countries of asylum (see for example, Marlowe 2010). Yet, many of the sections above demonstrate that it is in the everyday tasks of raising a family, going shopping, taking exercise and attending school that much of the work of building connections, and so of integrating more generally is accomplished. In the Place section: 6.4, we observed the importance families placed on being near to basic amenities such as local shops. Importantly, this was in reference not only those that catered to specific cultural or religious needs, but also big national and international chains, with several families citing them as places that they enjoyed visiting together and where, on occasion, they were able to make initial if fleeting relationships with others. In the Children and School section: 6.3, we note that finding, attending and doing well at school were priorities for every parent and child with whom we spoke, and that for children themselves, school was a key site where they hoped to make friends. This emphasis on education and achievement may be heightened by a desire to overcome ruptures in children's education caused by forced migration (see for example, Bloch et al. 2015) but surely resonates with parents and children everywhere, regardless of immigration status.

The 'everyday' nature of families' integration is perhaps most evident in their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst as we explore in the Reunited Families in Lockdown section: 6.8, the refugee families in our cohort might have faced specific issues due to insecurity of housing and lack of access to digital devices during full lockdown in the UK; many of their experiences seem to reflect those of the population as a whole. Children felt bored, this placed a burden upon parents who became concerned for their schooling and social lives, and walking outdoors became, for many, the only form of activity they could actively pursue for three months. Limits placed on household mixing meant that usual social activities – meeting for coffee, chatting, visiting friends' homes – could no longer occur. But people adapted to new ways of keeping in touch virtually or found ways to socialise that complied with government regulations. In many ways then, refugee families' responses to the exceptional circumstances imposed by lockdown were as far from exceptional as can be imagined. Thus, our findings support an understanding of refugee integration that privileges everyday experiences, an understanding that itself can serve to emphasise the aspirations of many of the refugees in this, and previous studies (e.g. Strang et al. 2017), who hope to make a positive contribution as equal members of their new communities:

"the ordinary can provide a helpful framework for viewing resettled refugees as peers in social life, capable of meaningful contributions to family, community and society" (Marlowe 2010: 190).

We note too that framing refugee experiences through the lens of the everyday promotes recognition of people's agency in developing social connections that themselves have further integrative potential. As we note in the Place section: 6.4, two people found work or opportunities for self-employment simply from going into

local halal shops and striking up conversations with their owners. Cementing the importance of agency in our understandings both the act of connecting and its potential for integration was people's pragmatism when faced with systems barriers as described in section 6.6 (Navigating Systems – Social Links). As we suggest there, accepting the limitations of temporary social housing does not necessarily denote a lack of understanding of systems, nor gaps in linking connections. Instead, for some recently reunited refugee families, it represented an everyday act of agency whereby they chose to accept some limitations whilst challenging others, and so was an area of commonality with UK citizens who, if they find themselves homeless, face much the same hurdles.

Moreover, there is evidence throughout our findings of people's agency in choosing which connections to build, for what purposes and at what stage in the pathway we outline in the Social Connections and the Integration 'Journey' section: 7.1. In section 6.4 (Place), we note that at least one family were actively, and explicitly, avoiding building strong bonds with people with whom they shared a national identity, from a desire to maintain boundaries around their private lives. Other families were making the opposite choice, seeking out opportunities to join a co-national community in a new city until such time as they felt more confident communicating in English. In neither case were families simply forced by circumstance into these decisions. Instead, as family units they had assessed what they needed at that precise moment in time from the relationships around them.

Elevating the everyday should not distract us from structural/systemic experiences of discrimination. Nor should it detract from the critical importance to those whose integration journeys are just the beginning of negotiating everyday priorities and through this, of meeting personal and familial goals. But it can and should move our gaze as researchers and as a society away from essentialising refugees as eternal passive victims of circumstance and towards a recognition of people's agency and desire for independence. This is a lesson with consequences not only for policy but for service provision itself, given that as previous studies have found, a focus on victimhood can entrench rather than overcome vulnerability (see for example, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2003). It also highlights the potential for bringing refugees together with others in their communities around issues of common concern rather than insisting upon the exceptionality of their experiences.

7.3 Shifting Definitions: Understanding Connections Over Time

Having explored in sections 7.1 (Social Connections and the Integration 'Journey') and 7.2 (Everyday Connections) two complementary ways of understanding the role of social connections in integration, in this final section we use our data to contribute to debates around the exact nature of connections themselves. Throughout, we note the influence of time, identified as a crucial factor that influences integration (see Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019). Our findings suggest that time does not only influence people's confidence in and opportunities to form connections. It also influences the nature of the connections themselves. In recounting their pathways towards friendship or their repeated interactions with certain services, families told us about connections that did not fit into static categories but were fluid, evolving relationships. We explore each of the standard typologies of bonds, bridges, and links in turn below, drawing on examples from the qualitative findings outlined in

chapter 6, to demonstrate the fluidity of connections both in terms of their meaning to families from an emic perspective; and the resources that relationships generated.

In the Indicators of Integration Framework, social bonds are defined as relationships with those similar to you, involve high levels of trust and generate confidence as well as practical support (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019). In the Friendship and Trust section: 6.5, we noted that in the early stages after their arrival in the UK, refugee families most commonly – but not uniformly – built friendships with people from co-national communities, or relied upon their extended family who had been in the UK for some time. We could choose therefore to define these relationships as being bonds, with the similarity in question being a shared ethnicity or nationality. However, if we look at other aspects of people's lives and identities, many of these friends and family members had been in the UK for far longer than our participants, and so were gateways, or bridges, to new information, places and resources. For example, as male sponsor G8 explained, he moved to Glasgow specifically because he was encouraged to do so by a friend, who was himself from Sudan. As members of the same national diaspora and a close friendship group, the two men shared many aspects of identity and had a close and trusting relationship. Yet his friend had been in Glasgow for nine years, far longer than him, and so was identified as being the key person who was helping him to build a life for his family in Glasgow. Thus, a bond premised on some shared aspects of identity took on characteristics of a bridge, linking Sponsor G8 into services and amenities in a new city. Children too benefited from similar 'vertical bonds' (Ryan 2011). Sponsor G8's son, aged 12, told us about his experiences of being helped at school by other pupils who spoke Arabic like him, and so could interpret for him in class as they had been in the city for longer and were fluent in English. Female sponsor G10, describing how she now helps newcomers to her city having lived there for several years, reminds us too that people's own identity, as experienced 'guides' to local life as opposed to unsure newcomers, can shift and develop over time.

Social bridges are described in the same document (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019) as being trusted connections, but with people from a different background. Here we explore a relationship described to us by Family B4. Their closest contact in the UK were a British couple (see section 6.5: Friendship and Trust). They had met through a formal organisation, who had arranged for the British couple to host Sponsor B4 when he was left homeless after his grant of status. This relationship then, quite clearly, began as a bridging one, and indeed was facilitated through the sponsor's 'linking' relationship with a charity operating in his area. However, over time, the relationship had become somewhat more horizontal and, in terms of the levels of trust and emotional support that flowed through the connection, e.g. Family B4's description of them as 'our family', certainly it seemed to have become more akin to a bond. Not only did the type of relationship appear to shift over time from being a bridge to being a bond; but the resources accessed through the relationship had moved on from the provision of essentials i.e. emergency shelter; to chat, information and gifts for the couple's children. A fascinating subject for further study would be to engage with people such as the UK couple involved to discuss their views of the relationship and what reciprocal emotional or practical benefits they gained from it.

Finally, in the Reciprocity and Giving Back section: 6.7, we highlighted some of the ambiguities of the relationship between refugee families and trusted service providers, in this case, our project partners, British Red Cross and Barnardo's. These third sector organisations emerged strongly as connections that linked refugees to statutory systems. Given that both third sector partners are large, national charities, families' relationships with them as institutions would appear to be vertical rather than horizontal as regards power differentials between them. However, several people described their relationship with these charities as being based on high levels of inter-personal trust in named workers who, for them, were *'like family'*. Slotting these relationships into one of the three static connections categories – bonds, bridges or links – therefore becomes difficult if we privilege families' own descriptions. Once again, we suggest that the multiplexity and shifting nature of this relationship would need to be explored through engagement with both parties to it, highlighting the need in future research to build multi-directionality – a key principle of integration – into research activities themselves, which in this case could allow the researcher to explore service providers' views of the "politics of everyday encounter" (Askins 2015) hinted at in our findings.

In summary, if we take the idea of intra-group relationships (bonds) and inter-group relationships (bridges) and apply it to a context where we accept that people's own identities in the social space are evolving over time, we can see that a relationship with the same person could be both intra-group (we both come from the same country) and inter-group (I have only just arrived, but you have been here a while). In this way, the relationship can have some of the quality of a bond, but in certain – but importantly not all – ways, can act as a bridge. This resonates with, and develops further, the concept of 'vertical bonds' elaborated by Ryan (2011: 52). Equally, it opens up the potential for further research work where the interplay between connection and identity could be explored in more depth. If bonds are defined as being relationships with people who are most like me, what counts as a bond will change over time as one's own identity evolves, for example from recipient of social housing to home owner; from school pupil to university student; from asylum seeker to refugee to British citizen. We suggest then that in future work, we should shift our focus from grouping people in apparently similar ways and instead engage, as researchers, with who participants feel they are and the relational factors that have contributed to their sense of identity over time.

8. Implications for Policy and Practice

The qualitative findings suggest that reunited refugee families are at varying stages of the integration process depending on their circumstances and priorities. Their ability to progress along their chosen integration pathway is partly mediated by the absence or presence of trusting relationships, in addition to structural and systemic factors. Highlighted below are a series of implications and suggestions for policy and practice in supporting refugee families to exercise agency in building their own social networks and facilitating their progress along their personal integration pathways.

Supporting families to map a pathway towards meeting their personal integration goals: There is a key role for agencies to continue to support reunited families to identify their short to long term goals in terms of participating fully in society and setting out a pathway for their family to integrate in the UK.

Supporting refugee families to feel safe and secure in their homes and in their local areas: Refugee families need clear and full information of their rights and options in, for example, choosing suitable accommodation for their families, in an area that is accessible to schools and local amenities.

School is a key accelerator for integration: Refugee families who experienced delays in accessing school places were at a disadvantage in developing informal and formal connections with other children and parents and were more vulnerable to experiencing loneliness and isolation.

Being housed in a friendly area with access to local amenities is a protective factor in local integration: The data suggests that building relationships with people locally not only requires the right conditions but is also a process that takes time. Facilitators include opportunities for interaction, friendliness of neighbours and a sense of commonality.

A lack of supportive bonds in the UK: Refugee families who do not have extended family in the UK and acutely miss extended family in their home country, may find it harder to progress along their integration pathway than those who have family support in the UK.

Opportunities to enrol in school, language classes or in other community activities are key protective factors in building wider social networks: Key barriers to establishing friendships with people local to the area included a lack of opportunity to meet people, and low confidence in English.

Refugees expressed a desire to contribute to wider society: being able to contribute emerged as contingent on having the time to get practical and emotional issues in one's own life sorted out, and then begin able to move on to make the contribution to society.

Supporting refugee families to develop and strengthen their social networks

Supporting refugee families to exercise agency to develop their social networks offers an opportunity to move away from thinking of refugees as passive victims of circumstance and towards supporting them to build full and independent lives in the UK.

Social connections alone cannot always overcome the structural confines of statutory systems and their impact on refugee integration: Third sector organisations provide vital connections to many families in supporting them to overcome structural barriers (in accessing suitable housing for example) but they are not enough on their own.

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